

# Fifty Shades of Overkill

by TheBleachDoctor

Category: Halo, Mass Effect

Genre: Adventure, Sci-Fi

Language: English

Characters: Admiral Hackett, EDI, Shepard (F), Tali'Zorah

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2013-02-12 00:53:38

Updated: 2014-04-11 22:58:31

Packaged: 2016-04-27 03:02:42

Rating: T

Chapters: 4

Words: 34,074

Publisher: [www.fanfiction.net](http://www.fanfiction.net)

Summary: When you become an extragalactic entity, meeting other galactic civilizations becomes an inevitable occurrence, and First Contact rarely goes well for the less-advanced society. Pre-ME through ME3. Rated T for language and implied sexual situations later on. Extremely Light parody on Halo OPness AKA Halo tech taken to its logical conclusion.

## 1. Chapter 1

\_Author's Notes: For those of you who have come over from my Halo/SW fic "The Bow and the Gun", welcome, and get ready for one shit-storm of action and&#160;| no, actually. There will be massive curbstomps and the like, but the large majority of this story will be political maneuvering and vigilante justice, courtesy of the crew of the Normandy. (For those of you who have not, read chapters 1-5 of my Halo/SW crossover, as it actually sets the stage for this.)\_

\_To be clear, I will NOT be buffing Citadel technology. They might get more advanced tech sooner, and they might build more ships, but they WON'T be getting anything that doesn't already exist in the ME universe.\_

\_Same goes for the UNSC and Sangheili Empire. They won't get anything that doesn't already exist in some form in the Halo universe.\_

\_This story starts pre-ME, and will continue on until ME3. All canon characters will make a showing in one form or another.\_

\_Also, if you were wondering about the title&#160;| well, this is Mass Effect, what do you think is going to happen?\_

\_That being said, enjoy!\_

List of suggested music to play while reading

Days are Numbered-Black Veil Brides

Rock Anthem for Saving the World-Martin O'Donnel

Archangel-Two Steps from Hell

**\*\*Chapter 1: Scrolling Introduction\*\***

**\_\_\*\*[[January 15\*\*\_\_\*\*th\*\*\_\_\*\*, 2588-The UNSC and the Sangheili Empire begin a joint colonization effort of a new galaxy, which became accessible through ancient Forerunner Slipspace gates. Upon arrival, they find a system which is uncannily similar to the Sol system. Colonization begins, with the Earth-lookalike planet being used as a base. It is named Terra.]]\*\*\_**

**\_\_\*\*[[December 30\*\*\_\_\*\*th\*\*\_\_\*\*, 2588-Full industrialization of Terra is completed. The planet now sports four artificial rings, which are used as orbital shipyards. 1,000 ODPs orbit the planet.]]\*\*\_**

**\_\_\*\*[[January 16\*\*\_\_\*\*th\*\*\_\_\*\*, 2589-The UNSC and Sangheili Empire colonization forces are granted sovereignty from their respective governments, due to distance. They decide to form the Systems Alliance, which is governed by a council of Humans, Sangheili, Kig-Yar, Unngoy, and Mgalekgolo. Two individuals from each species are on the council.]]\*\*\_**

**\_\_\*\*[[March 25\*\*\_\_\*\*th\*\*\_\_\*\*, 2589-With colonization well under way in hundreds of other systems, the Systems Alliance prioritizes the reinforcement of all inner colonies. Outer colonies are left out in the dust in terms of defense for the time being. A heavily damaged complex is found on the fourth planet in the Sol system. It is too heavily demolished for much data to be gathered, but excavation yields three notable items. The first is what appears to be a data obelisk of sorts, which utilizes a telepathic field to transfer data. Unfortunately, the obelisk is not calibrated for Humans, and fries the brain of the scientist who tries to use it. Running low on power, the obelisk shuts down, and cannot be brought back online. The second item are the remains of an ancient spacecraft, nearly 50,000 years old. The computer systems onboard are completely incompatible with all Systems Alliance tech, and rebuff all attempts to study them. The main reactor is out of whatever fuel was used to power it. The third item is a large cache of what some scientists have dubbed Element Zero, or "Eezo". It is a mineral that releases Dark Matter when exposed to an electrical current. Even though the scientific community is intrigued, the substance is declared hazardous, and is locked up as a result.]]\*\*\_**

**\_\_\*\*[[June 17\*\*\_\_\*\*th\*\*\_\_\*\*, 2589-A large, damaged and inoperable tuning-fork shaped object is discovered encased in a sphere of ice out in far orbit of the Terra system. When all attempts to study the object are met with failure, the Alliance encases the object in a metal shell, deeming the Dark Matter core to be too dangerous.]]\*\*\_**

**\_\_\*\*[[February 4\*\*\_\_\*\*th\*\*\_\_\*\*, 2590-The Systems Alliance begins to colonize the planet Shanxi. In the same system, an artificial construct is found. It is an intact version of the tuning-fork shaped object that was found in the Sol system. When an AI attempted to access the near-dormant computer systems, it activated. It was**

identified as a method of FTL travel, only slightly faster than modern Slipspace drives. Seeing as the Systems Alliance has no purpose for these objects, an attempt was made to deactivate it. That was not possible, and the device itself prevented the construction of a metal casing. All attempts to destroy the construct are hindered by the construct itself. The scientific community dubs the construct a "Mass Relay" due to its mass-altering properties, and a token force of one Cruiser and two Frigates is assigned to guard the device as a precaution. (Footnote: A Systems Alliance Officer called the FTL-Relay "Scientific Bullshit of the highest degree." According to our AIs, such technology shouldn't even be possible.))]\*\*\_

\*\*[April 14\*\*\*\*th\*\*\*\*, 2590&%\$\*\*#(#... 4,14, 2157 CE-Migrant Fleet Cruiser \*\*\_\*\*Tayyo\*\*\_\*\*, in FTL transit]\*\*

"Put that fire out, you bosh'tet, before it roasts our secondary generators!"

Tali'Zorah nar Rayya shouted at one of the acting crewmembers of the \_Tayyo\_ as he ran around with the others trying to fix the damage to the badly ravaged vessel. Bulkheads were torn open and fires spewed from crippled systems as damage reports streamed in on the Engineering section's consoles. The Eezo Drive Core, which was already patchwork, struggled to stay operational. Tali frantically mashed her fingers against the console's controls, attempting to maintain the containment field. If it collapsed, the entire ship would go up like dry tinder.

"What's the status on our engines," a scratchy voice came over the comm. It was the \_Tayyo's\_ captain, Suma'Narea vas Tayyo. His voice sounded strained and tired.

"We're doing our best," Tali reported, "but those Batarians did a number on the ship. The heat sinks took the worst of it, and our Static Discharge vanes are nearing maximum capacity. We can give you a maximum of one minute in FTL. After that, we have to drop out, or the discharge will fry us all."

"Acknowledged," Suma wearily replied, "keep me updated."

On the bridge of the aging Quarian cruiser, the captain of the \_Tayyo\_ slumped in his command chair. A simple rescue mission had turned into a debacle. One of the Migrant Fleet's Admirals had been captured by Batarian slavers, and the Admiralty had sent a task force to rescue him, along with the other Quarians that had been nabbed in the same slave run.

They had rescued the Admiral, and sent him back to the Migrant Fleet, while three Cruisers led the Batarians on a wild goose chase, drawing them away from the Admiral. That's where everything had gone wrong.

The recon teams had only detected a portion of the slaver's forces.

They missed the Dreadnought.

The \_Tayyo\_ was the only survivor of the retaliation, and was running for its life. Not that there was much life left in the run-down vessel. The ship would probably have to be scuttled when their

mission was complete.

The Quarian cruiser was en route to the Theta system, which was practically barren, save for a dormant relay. Since the system was in Citadel space, activating the relay was out of the question. Their only chance would be to quickly discharge their excess static in the atmosphere of one of the planets, and jump away. If they could do that before the Batarian Dreadnought caught up, they would be set.

"Exiting FTL in five seconds," the Helmsman stated, "Exiting FTL in 3.2 seconds."

The multicolored light show around the ship dropped away to reveal the desolate Theta system.

"Set course for the nearest planet," Suma ordered, "Get ready to discharge the-

"Sir!" the Sensors officer cried out, "Slaver fleet has dropped out of FTL! Four Frigates, two Cruisers, and a Dreadnought!"

The Captain of the Tayyo paled, "This can't be happening. ETA till the slavers reach us?"

"A minute, sir."

"Hey, something's odd," the sensors officer muttered, before his eyes widened in surprise, "Captain, Relay 314 is active!"

"What?" Captain Suma asked in surprise, "That Relay is supposed to be inactive!"

"Well, someone turned it on!" the crewman replied.

The course of action was clear.

"Set course for that relay!" Suma shouted out, "I'll take my chances with the unknown over Batarian slavers any day!"

The Tayyo's engines roared as the heavily damaged Quarian ship rocketed towards Relay 314. The Batarian's blocky ships followed at a more sedate pace.

On the bridge of Slaver Dreadnought Devastation, the Batarian captain chuckled as he watched the Quarian ship flee from his mighty vessel. Those vagrants were right to fear the power of his mighty capital ship. True, it wasn't the newest model, but it was definitely more modern than those drifting hunks of metal the Quarians called ships. Soon, he would recapture that Quarian Admiral. He didn't know he had such an important individual in his grasp, but he would soon secure that asset again. The Migrant fleet would surely pay a large sum of credits for one of their leaders back.

"Sir," one of the Devastation's sensor officers reported, "Relay 314 is active!"

"What?!" the Batarian Captain scowled, "Full speed! Don't let the Quarians reach that Relay!"

As the Slaver's ships bore down on the Tayyo, they began to get desperate, firing their mass accelerators at the Quarian vessel in an attempt to disable it.

"Men," Suma'Narea vas Tayyo announced as the Relay grew ever closer, the Tayyo shaking with glancing hits from mass accelerator rounds, "it's been an honor serving with you all, keelah se'lai."

A bolt of light reached out from the Relay, dancing over the surface of the Tayyo. In a flash, it disappeared, catapulted thousands of light-years away in an instant. The Batarian slaver ships made tight turns away from the Relay. They weren't stupid; they knew the dangers of activating dormant relays.

Nearby, a small Salarian STG frigate monitored the group of Batarian slavers. What had their attention, though, was Relay 314.

"Not good," Captain Kirrahae muttered under his breath, "Not good at all."

What started out as a simple tracking mission had turned into the discovery of a potential catastrophe. They were just supposed to track the slavers back to their base, however, in the process they found that someone had activated a Relay leading into unknown space. The chances of another Rachni war occurring was too high for his tastes.

"Leave some drones here," Captain Kirrahae ordered his bridge crew, "and get us a link to a comm buoy. We'll need the Hierarchy's help on this."

\*\*[[Questioning: Are you tired of pest getting onboard your ship?  
Enthusiastic: Then buy Heed Industries Decontamination systems today.  
Convincingly: You'll never find another bug or similar pest onboard your ship ever again.]]\*\*

All things considered, Captain Kari Heartnet was finding her job to be boring as hell. Sure, she was proud of her Nexus-class Heavy Cruiser, but it never saw any action. The Angelwing was a ship designed for one thing, and one thing only; War. However, the Systems Alliance was as peaceful as it could be. Crime rate was at a virtual 0%, there was no piracy, and as far as they could tell, they were alone in this galaxy. The Systems Alliance had come a long way in just the span of a single year. When the colonization forces entered this galaxy, they had been surprised when their superluminal communications systems could not contact the UNSC or the Sangheili Empire. The only way to contact them was to go back through the Slipspace gate, and do it manually. Due to the communications barrier, the UNSC and SE granted the colonization forces sovereignty; so that they may spread without being tied down to commitments back "home".

As if possessed, the colonization forces spread at an unprecedented rate. They had already colonized 40 worlds, and their newest one, Shanxi, was setting up rather quickly. The Alliance didn't even have 1% of this galaxy explored yet!

Things were shaping up nicely, though. The Systems Alliance's two main worlds, Terra and Terra Nova, were industrial powerhouses. They churned out an average of twelve ships a day; so fast that they had

to resort to crewing the ships with Unngoy, as they were the only species that reproduced fast enough to actually meet the demands of the Alliance's rapid expansion. Scientists predicted that within the decade, Humans and Sangheili would be a minority, not to mention the Mgalekgolo and Kig-Yar. Although, to tell the truth, nobody knew exactly how to count Mgalekgolo population. How exactly does one count a hive mind? Like that one old candy commercial said, "The world may never know."

Lost in her reminiscing, Kari almost missed the startled exclamation of one of her bridge crew.

"The Relay is showing activity!" the Ensign yelled, "Something is coming through!"

The rings in the center of the Mass Relay began to whirl around, glowing brighter and brighter until they flared up in one gigantic flash of light. A small vessel appeared, resembling a ring on a stick. It was grayish in color and had what appeared to be some types of cargo containers on the back stick end.

"One Frigate-weight vessel has exited the Relay," the Ensign reported.

"Shields up!" Kari ordered, as the Angelwing and its two escorting Rome-class Frigates, the Frontier and Guardian, erected their shields which shimmered silver before becoming completely transparent.

"Hail that vessel." The captain said.

"Hailing."

\*\*[Migrant Vessel, \*\*\_\*\*Tayyo\*\*\_]\*\*

"Keelah Se'lai." Suma muttered upon exiting the Relay. Immediately upon arrival, they had run directly into a small group of alien ships. They were blocky, ugly things, all hard angles and geometric shapes. Even though their silvery armor reflected some aesthetic tastes, it was clear the ships were built with only one thing in mind; war. They positively bristled with weapons emplacements, and the barrels of two bow-mounted guns were clearly visible on all three vessels.

The two smaller ones were about the size of a standard Citadel Cruiser. They had a tall, tapered front with slanted armor plates on the sides. Two barrels barely stuck out of the hull, and were bigger than any mass accelerator Suma had ever seen before. The ship got wider and taller as it moved back, and had some sort of observation tower with windows sitting on the top. Two massive engine blocks stuck out the sides at the very back, and were rectangular in shape. Some form of lettering was stamped on the side of the ship, but it didn't translate.

The biggest of the three ships was purely massive. It wasn't as big, tall, or wide as the Asari's flaunted *Destiny Ascension*, but it outclassed a standard Dreadnought. It looked like a tall, thin rectangle, with a thinner front than the back, widening out in steps as you got closer to the back. Silver armor wrapped around the ship, forming a protective, glimmering shell. Numerous weapons

emplacements jutted out at every conceivable angle. Two truly gargantuan bow-mounted cannons were evident on the front of the ship.

Also, there were windows, which were something one didn't see every day on a warship.

"The two smaller vessels are Cruiser-weight," the sensor officer reported, jolting Suma out of his trance, "They measure at about 635 meters, while the largest vessel is Dreadnought-weight, at 1,200 meters. I can't get anything else, they're encased in some sort of energy envelope."

"Sir!" the communications crewman shouted, "We're being hailed!"

"Well, patch it through!" Suma barked out. This was important; he was about to represent the Quarrians in a First Contact Situation. He needed to handle this carefully; it could well determine the future of the Migrant Fleet.

After nothing happened, he turned to the communications officer, "I told you to open a channel, what's taking so long?!"

"Iâ€¦I don't know," the officer replied, flustered as he mashed the holographic keyboard, "We're receiving some kind of transmission, but it doesn't match up with anything on our database. If I had to take a guess, I would say our Communications suites are incompatible."

Suma groaned, "Well that is just great! Can we transmit audio only on a radio frequency?"

"I can give it a shot," the officer replied meekly, before the Engineering section opened an audio channel to the bridge.

"Captain, we're experiencing a series of cascading failures down here!" the panicked voice of one Tali'Zorah sounded over the speakers, "We need to discharge the core, now!"

An explosion was heard over the channel before it cut out.

"Helm, full speed to the nearest planet!" Suma'Narea shouted at his pilot, before telling the communications officer, "Broadcast a repeating distress signal. Hopefully they'll understand."

\*\*[UNSC \*\*\_\*\*Angelwing\*\*\_\*\*, Bridge]\*\*

"What's going on?" Kari asked in curiosity and a bit of wariness as she watched the unknown alien vessel. A few seconds ago, a few explosions rocked it, before it started heading towards Shanxi.

"It's a repeating audio message," one of the Ensigns reported, "I can't understand it, but if I had to hazard a guess, I'd say it was a distress call."

Kari pondered for a minute, before making a decision, "Tell the Guardian to accompany the alien ship. If it makes any hostile moves, disable it. Otherwise, just escort it."

The captain of the Guardian acknowledged, before it peeled off to escort the wounded ship to Shanxi.

"What can you tell me about that ship, Cromwell?" Kari addressed the ship's AI as its avatar materialized next to her. Various technological advancements allowed AIs to materialize a life-size hologram anywhere on the ship. Cromwell's avatar took the form of a highly-decorated rear-admiral from some old 20th century video game. He was almost indistinguishable from a regular human.

"The alien vessel is old; centuries old, if our scans are accurate. It uses an antiproton drive for propulsion, and is armed with two main kinetic energy weapons of unknown design. A series of turrets are evident on the hull. They sport a mixture of kinetic energy weapons and pulse lasers. Torpedo tubes are present as well. If I had to take a guess, I'd say we're looking at a patchwork, run-down junker. It's about frigate-weight, so I wouldn't worry too much. There's not much room for internal space. General Williams can handle whatever is inside." Cromwell straightened his uniform; a pointless gesture, since he was a hologram.

"So it's an old warship," Kari contemplated a holographic representation of the enemy ship as it hovered near her, "It looks really delicate. Wouldn't the maneuvers it's pulling tear it apart?"

"That's the interesting thing;" Cromwell became excited, "the ship is exhibiting gravitational fluctuations and mass-altering properties, similar to the Mass Relay!"

"Wait a second," Kari looked Cromwell in the eye, "are you saying that we found the creators of the Mass Relays?"

Cromwell shook his head, "No, they seem to sport more primitive versions of the Mass Relay's technology. If I had to hazard a guess, I would say that their species found the Mass Relays and based their technology around them."

Kari blinked in surprise, "What? We couldn't make heads nor tails of that Relay. Are you saying that they could?"

Cromwell shrugged, "This is all just speculation. I hope we'll learn soon, though."

**\*\*[\*\*\_\*\*Tayyo\*\*\_\*\*, bridge]\*\***

"Static discharge complete, sir," one of the crewmen reported, "Ready to retract discharge vanes."

"Do so," the captain ordered. Finally, disaster was averted. Maybe now they could-

"Captain!" a voice from the engineering section screamed, "the fuel tanks! They're-"

Whatever was being said was cut off in a cascade of screams and explosions as the Tayyo shook.

"Status!" Suma yelled, frantically trying to keep his balance.



"Main fuel tanks have exploded!" someone reported, panicked,  
"Auxiliary fuel tanks are leaking! Mass Effect fields have collapsed!  
We are losing orbit!"

\*\*[\*\*\_\*\*Guardian\*\*\_\*\*, Bridge]\*\*

The commanding officer of the \_Guardian\_ squawked in disdain at the ramshackle vessel represented on the tactical display. He was a Kig-Yar with the rather lackluster name of Mut, and one of the only of his species serving on a UNSC vessel. Even though the Systems Alliance encompassed all their species, the military branches opted to stay separate. So the UNSC and ONI stayed intact, while the Sangheili maintained several fleets. The Kig-Yar only had two fleets, but that wasn't due to any restrictions. They could make as many fleets as they wanted; they simply lacked the resources and drive to expand. The Unngoy possessed no fleets, despite having a sizable presence in both the UNSC and SE. Nevertheless, it was odd to see a Kig-Yar serving on a UNSC ship, as they generally preferred the familiarity of their own military organization, the Kig-Yar Confederation. Mut, on the other hand, preferred the professionalism of the UNSC. The \_Guardian's\_ captain happened to be groundside on Shanxi, so that left Mut in charge.

After first contact with the aliens, he was tasked with escort duty. While Mut wasn't exactly happy spending his stint in the captain's chair playing babysitter to unknown aliens, he knew it was important. As with any First Contact situation, the possible outcomes were endless, and he had to represent the best of the Systems Alliance. He would be worrying more about it, though, if he could actually talk to the aliens.

They seemed to be broadcasting a repeating distress signal, and he could see why. The section near the engines sported some hull breaches, and the frigate-sized vessel was trailing smoke and flames. After it entered the upper atmosphere of Shanxi, it extended some sort of vanes. That had put everyone on edge, but it turned out to just be a method of static discharge. Things were looking pretty mundane.

Until the middle section of the ship pretty much exploded.

It was a miracle that it held together, but it was losing altitude, and fast. Thrusters all over the ship were firing up, attempting to escape the planet's gravity, but they were too underpowered to affect much change.

"Match their descent speed, and plot their trajectory!" Mut squawked at the bridge crew, who frantically started mashing their consoles. The nimble Rome-class frigate descended with the alien vessel, its engines effortlessly maneuvering the massive hunk of metal.

"Sir, the alien vessel is projected to land right on top of Shanxi!" one of the Unngoy operators shouted in panic, "Estimated time till impact is at two minutes!"

"Crap," Mut swore, "alright, nudge them off course! Shunt auxiliary power to shields!"

\*\*[\*\*\_\*\*Tayyo\*\*\_\*\*, Bridge]\*\*

"What are they?" Suma wondered, gripping the armrest of his chair for dear life as his ship quaked around him. The alien cruiser-weight vessel was getting closer to his, even as they plummeted towards the ground, "They wouldn't! they are! Divert power to kinetic barriers! Brace for-"

The \_Guardian's\_ shields smashed into the \_Tayyo\_ as the Kinetic Barriers of the Quarian cruiser slammed against the UNSC cruiser's hull. Both protective barriers flared up as the \_Tayyo\_ was hurled in a different direction. Pieces of the ancient vessel flew off as the ship began to burn up from the heat of reentry.

\*\*[\*\*\_\*\*Guardian\*\*\_\*\*, Bridge]\*\*

"Nudge, I said NUDGE!" Mut cursed at the bridge crew as the ship shook under the impact. The alien vessel spiraled away, out of control, as it began to disintegrate.

"Whoever you were, sorry," Mut muttered, "you're on your own."

\*\*[\*\*\_\*\*Tayyo\*\*\_\*\*, Bridge]\*\*

"Structural integrity failing!" one of the Quarian officers screamed over the groans of the dying ship, "Inertial dampeners failing! Thruster assembly offline! Escape pods inoperative! Mass Effect field generator not responding!"

Suma looked out the window at the increasingly approaching ground.

"All hands, brace for impact! All hands-"

Then the world exploded in a shriek of metal and roaring flames.

\*\*[\*\*\_\*\*Spirit of Fire\*\*\_\*\*, Bridge]\*\*

"Serina, get us in the air."

"Aye, Sir."

It had been a few years since they rejoined the UNSC, but the crew of the \_Spirit of Fire\_ was still! well, the crew of the \_Spirit of Fire\_.

Captain Cutter had fully expected his ship to be decommissioned due to age. What he didn't expect was a full refit. True, he had less internal space, but he did now have a Super-MAC, pulse laser turrets, energy projectors, and a Spartan-Laser grid installed on his ship. Apparently, humanity had long since grown out of their naivety, and prepared themselves for any situation. If that entailed, arming colony ships to the teeth, so be it.

The \_Spirit of Fire\_ had been helping the new colony of Shanxi settle in, but with this First Contact scenario, standard protocol called for the scrambling of all space-worthy ships. So the Phoenix-class colony ship refit ascended into the heavens, its powerful thruster assembly pushing the massive behemoth into the sky like the hand of

god.

"Send a message to the Alliance Council and HIGHCOM, they need to know about this."

"Already on it, Captain," Serina smirked, "by the way, you've got some dust on your shoulder."

\*\*[Citadel Space, Theta System, Slaver Dreadnought  
\*\*\_\*\*Devastation\*\*\_\*\*, Bridge]\*\*

"Consequences be damned! If those Quarrians think they can escape the wrath of the Hegemony, they've got another thing coming!" the Captain snarled.

The helmsman silently sighed. It had taken a full twenty minutes of deliberation before they actually came to a decision, and in his opinion, it was a stupid one. The Hegemony contracted (secretly, of course) them to increase the prominence of the Batarian Hegemony. They weren't paid to explore unknown space through Relays. That was above their pay grade. However, he had to obey his superior officer, so he gunned the Dreadnought's antiproton engines, and began communicating with the Relay to prepare for the jump.

Whatever happened from here on out was not his fault.

The entire Batarian slaver fleet was struck by light from the Relay, before they were catapulted thousands of light-years away.

\*\*[STG frigate, Bridge]\*\*

"And a bad situation goes to a terrible situation," Captain Kirrahae cursed his bad luck. The only thing he could hope for was that there was no hostile race on the other side of that Relay, or else those slavers just might start another Rachni war.

Oh, where was that Turian Patrol group?! They should have been there by now!

\*\*[\*\*\_\*\*Angelwing\*\*\_\*\*, Bridge]\*\*

"The Relay is showing activity," one of the Mgalekgolo crew members rumbled in a voice that was more felt than heard. Of course, the Mgalekgolo was in a civilian carapace, and was only slightly larger than a human.

The Relay's rings began to spin faster once again, and after a flash of light, seven ships appeared.

"We've got one cruiser-weight ship, two frigate-weight ships, and four corvette-weight ships," a human Ensign reported, "what should we do?"

Kari contemplated the new arrivals. They looked vastly different than the earlier ship, and were hell of a lot newer. The largest cruiser-weight ship had what appeared to be spinal-mounted guns, as did the frigate-weight ships. They were blocky, unattractive things, very utilitarian and less aesthetic than Human-Covenant Era UNSC vessels, if such a thing was possible.

"Hail them for now," Kari ordered, "audio only on all radio frequencies. I know we won't understand each other, but maybe they can understand that we want to talk. We'll wait for a response."

\*\*[\*\*\_\*\*Devastator\*\*\_\*\*, Bridge]\*\*

"Who in the galaxy builds ships that ugly?!" the Batarian Captain scowled at the holographic representation of the unknown vessels. The helmsman rolled his four eyes, they were obviously dealing with a First Contract situation.

After a moment of deliberation, the Captain grinned, "I've got it! The Quarians activated a Relay and hid behind it! They've been building up force here! Those must be their new ships! Scan for our tracking beacon!"

After a few seconds, one of the crewmembers manning a console reported, "It's faint, but the Quarian ship is on the surface of that planet. Detecting a small settlement as well."

"I knew it!" The captain laughed, "Those pitiful Quarians won't stand a chance against us, we outnumber them completely! Get me a firing solution on that Quarian Dreadnought!"

If the helmsman wasn't as polite, he'd have been massaging his forehead. In his opinion, those ships looked nothing like Quarian design philosophy, and their energy readings were off the charts. Plus, they had attempted to communicate with them, and the captain just ignored them.

The communications officer muttered to the helmsman that the communication was in a language that didn't translate, which definitely meant they were dealing with a new species. Everybody knew it, and understood that the captain was an idiot, but they weren't paid to second-guess their superior officers. So they began to key in the commands to begin battle.

\*\*[\*\*\_\*\*Angelwing\*\*\_\*\*, Bridge]\*\*

"We're being ignored," Cromwell grumbled, "just who do they think they are?"

Kari shared the same sentiments, the only explanations for this were either they didn't possess radio technology (which she highly doubted) or they were hostile.

She opted to be on the safe side.

"Cromwell, spin up the MAC and Slipspace drive. Have all our guns get firing solutions on different ships. Charge the energy projector, but don't move the ship. We don't want to appear hostile."

"That may not be an issue," Cromwell supplied, "they're building up a charge in their spinal cannons."

Kari snapped into action immediately. She activated her neural lace, which gave her access to the neural net shared by every UNSC personnel aboard.

She sent out a message to every single person on board, "Brace for impact!"

\*\*[\*\*\_\*\*Devastator\*\*\_\*\*, Bridge]\*\*

"All ships, fire!" the captain roared. If they could take out that Dreadnought in a single volley, the cruiser would be easy pickings.

The \_Devastator\_ shook as the main gun fired a 20-kilo ferrous tungsten round lightened by mass effect fields at 1.3 percent the speed of light. The rest of his fleet added their fire to the volley, sending two 10-kilo slugs at 1 percent the speed of light and eight much smaller 1-kilo slugs at .5 percent the speed of light hurtling towards the presumably Quarian Dreadnought. To the observer, all the shots appeared to hit at exactly the same time. It was more than enough power to overload the kinetic barriers of any Dreadnought in existence.

So he was surprised when a silver shimmering envelope absorbed the power of the shots, incinerating the mass effect propelled slugs with their own kinetic energy converted into heat. The shots knocked the Dreadnought one kilometer off course, which it promptly corrected. Still, it was a major surprise.

"No, no, no!" the captain cursed, "Charge up the main gun again! Fire everything we have!"

\*\*[\*\*\_\*\*Angelwing\*\*\_\*\*, Bridge]\*\*

Captain Kari Heartnet scowled as the ship ceased shaking from the impact. That volley had brought the ship's shields down to 46%! There's no way she was letting them do that again!

"Use of full armament authorized!" she shouted through the neural Battle-net, "Blast them out of our space!"

The double MACs of the \_Frontier\_ and the \_Angelwing\_ barked as the bow-mounted accelerators of the Devastator and its escort flashed. At the same time, thousands of Archer launched from their pods as hundreds of Disruptor Torpedoes shot out of their tubes. Deck guns from both sides started strobing with muzzle flashes as they added their own fire to the mix. In the middle of it all, a magnificent beam of light lanced out from the \_Angelwing\_ and pierced the \_Devastator\_ amidships.

All this happened in the span of a single second.

And all hell broke loose in the span of a single second.

\*\*[\*\*\_\*\*Devastator\*\*\_\*\*, Bridge]\*\*

A blinding pillar of light speared the Bridge, instantly frying the crew with its searing heat. A millisecond later, two 600-ton Ferric-Tungsten slugs punched straight through the Drive core. The entire ship lit up like a supernova.

\*\*[\*\*\_\*\*Angelwing\*\*\_\*\*, Bridge]\*\*

Kari cried out in shock as she was thrown to the far wall from the force of the impacts. Various voices echoed around the Battle-net as damage reports streamed in.

"Bow Shields are offline!"

"Auxiliary Generators have sustained critical damage!"

"Unknowns are using some type of gravitational distortion missile weapon! We're losing armor plating fast!"

"Control lines to the MAC are offline!"

"Hull breaches in decks A-C, sealing affected areas!"

"Power failure to the hangar, we can't launch fighters!"

"Life support failing, switching to backups!"

Kari wondered if there was any good news.

"The Frontier has suffered critical damage to the superstructure! They're abandoning ship!"

There had to be at least some good news.

"Confirmed kill on alien cruiser-weight and frigate-weight vessels. Only two corvette-weight vessels survived."

That was really good news.

"Alright then," Kari ordered over the neural lace, "Take them out!"

"Negative," Cromwell informed her, "MAC is inoperable, and all deck guns are suffering from overheating. Archer pods are currently reloading. Hard Light guns are still charging. Energy Projector's capacitors are bone dry. Navigation suffered a systems failure and is currently rebooting. Our point defense systems aren't powerful enough to take out the remaining ships."

"So you're saying that we're sitting dead in the water?" Kari asked with a bit of incredulity.

"That is correct." Cromwell replied simply.

"Damn it!" Kari swore loudly, swinging her fist through a holographic display, which just fizzled a bit.

"Enemy vessels are breaking away," an Ensign informed Kari over the Battle-net, "They're heading towards Shanxi!"

The surviving Batarians were frightened badly. They lost two frigates, two cruisers, and their freaking DREADNOUGHT, and only took one enemy cruiser out of action! The alien Dreadnought peppered the two slaver frigates, which hightailed it towards the planet. They didn't want to be anywhere near that behemoth when it came back online. At least they could grab some slaves and bolt. They had to recoup their losses somehow.

As the \_Spirit of Fire\_ climbed out of Shanxi's atmosphere, it turned to face the two incoming Batarian slaver frigates.

The two Batarian ships were in awe of the apparent oversized Dreadnought, as it was bigger than the Destiny Ascension. Determined, they decided to go for it. The cost of the expedition was too high already to go back empty-handed.

They executed swerving, swooping evasive maneuvers, as the Spirit of Fire attempted to get a firing solution on the two diminutive craft. Deck guns peppered the kinetic barriers of the Batarian frigates, but they dived in unphased.

At the last second, they launched a pair of Disruptor Torpedoes in unison. They made hard turns, flanking the \_Spirit of Fire\_, pummeling it with their mass accelerator turrets, as the Torpedoes closed in, too close for point defense fire.

**\*\*[\*\*\_\*\*Spirit of Fire\*\*\_\*\*, Bridge]\*\***

Captain Cutter stared down the two missiles as tracer rounds streaked by the incoming projectiles. They were going to hit.

"All hands brace for impact!" he yelled over the PA, before grabbing hold of the sides of the holotank.

The Disruptor Torpedoes slammed into the shields, detonating on impact. However, no amount of energy shielding could block the gravitational distortions caused by the Mass Effect-powered weapons. Swathes of Titanium-B were torn off as the gravitational fluctuations ripped them off like a tiger tearing into its prey.

The entire ship quaked as Cutter barely managed to stay upright.

"Shields are down!" Serina cried out, "Massive damage to the frontal armor, hull breach in deck G, sealing affected area!"

"Alien vessels have entered the firing arcs of our Spartan Lasers!" a weapons officer announced loudly.

"Light them up!" Cutter shouted urgently.

Along the dorsal spine of the Phoenix-class colony ship, four turrets the size of an Onager MAC came to life. Shrouds covering the barrel slid upwards, revealing the laser's aperture. They swiveled to track the two frigates even as mass accelerator rounds pummeled the hull. The maws of the turrets started to radiate an ominous crimson hue. After three seconds, four bright blood-red lines of death, two per ship, skewered the Batarian frigates. A split second later, those ships exploded as their drive cores destabilized. The gravitational distortions ripped off some more hull plating, but the \_Spirit of Fire\_ emerged victorious from the cloud of debris. The inhabitants of Shanxi would be treated to a spectacular "meteor" shower that night, courtesy of the remains of the slavers.

Twelve Batarian escape pods watched in horror as their last ships were annihilated by the oversized Dreadnought over the nearby planet. Realizing that all hope was lost, they made hard burns for the Relay, instantly shot back to Citadel space.

On the damaged bridge of the Angelwing, Cromwell asked Kari, "Is it wise to let them flee?"

Kari nodded, "Let them run back to their leaders, with news of our power."

She looked over at the tactical map, as numerous Slipspace portals opened up, disgorging hundreds of ships of various makes, sizes, and species.

"Let them know the Systems Alliance will not bow before their aggression. We will stand firm, and hold the line! Please post that little speech to my blog, Cromwell. And will someone put out that fire!"

**\*\*[Theta System]\*\***

The slavers thought they were safe, until they arrived right in the middle of a Turian patrol fleet. They resigned themselves to their fate as frigates picked up their drifting escape pods, but in the back of their minds, they thought, "If we spin this just right, the Turians might do what we could not."

**\*\*[Codex]\*\***

**\*\*Mass Accelerator Bow Guns\*\***

Mass Accelerator Bow Guns are standard equipment on Citadel standard Cruisers and Dreadnoughts. Dreadnoughts fire 20-kilo ferrous tungsten rounds at 1.3% the speed of light. Cruisers are equipped with a smaller version that fires 10-kilo ferrous tungsten rounds at 1% the speed of light. Frigates are equipped with much smaller mass accelerators that fire 1-kilo ferrous tungsten slugs at 0.5% the speed of light.

**\*\*Disruptor Torpedoes\*\***

Disruptor Torpedoes are guided missiles equipped with a miniature eezo core. They have two modes. The first mode is to increase the mass of the torpedo beyond what the enemy's kinetic barriers are capable of blocking. However, this slows the torpedo, making it vulnerable to GARDIAN lasers and point defense systems. The second mode does not affect torpedo speed. Upon impact with the enemy vessel, the eezo core overloads, creating a localized field of irregular gravitational distortions, causing the target vessel moderate to extreme structural damage.

**\*\*[Accessing Systems Alliance Database, subsection UNSC, subsection User Manuals]\*\***

**\*\*[Excerpt from the Systems Alliance User Manual: Nexus-class Heavy Cruiser]\*\***

So you're the proud new Captain of a UNSC-built Nexus-class Heavy Cruiser! Congratulations, try to keep the floors clean.

Now, you need to know some things about this top-of-the-line capital ship. This is nothing like the venerable Marathon-class Heavy Cruiser. This is a lean, mean, machine capable of bringing High



Charity to its knees. While it is only slightly bigger than a Marathon, it has more weapons on it than the old First Fleet put together! Let's give you some specifications, so that you know exactly how much firepower is at your fingertips. Remember to pick your jaw up off the floor when you're done.

Length: 1,200 meters

Width: 310 meters

Height: 605 meters

Manufacturer: UNSC

Power: Deuterium Fusion Reactor (1), Forerunner Singularity Power Plant (1), Covenant Plasma Reactor (2)

Armor: 300cm Titanium-B Forerunner Battleplate

Slipspace: Enhanced Forerunner Translight Drive

Shields: Segmented Energy Shielding (Covenant Carrier equivalent) (1), Emergency Hardlight Barrier Generator (1)

Armament:

MAC (2)

Oversized Archer Pods (30)

Oversized Howler Pods (30)

60mm point defense guns (24)

Energy Projector (1)

50mm Hard Light guns (12)

Slipspace-Missile Pods (10)

Shiva Nukes (26)

HORNET mines (40)

ICWS (Mixture of pulse lasers and rotary cannons)

â€|Opening new fileâ€|

\*\*[Excerpt from Rome-class Frigate User Manual]\*\*

Manufacturer: UNSC

Power: Forerunner Singularity Power Plant (1), Backup deuterium reactor (2)

Shields: Segmented Energy Shielding (Covenant Destroyer equivalent) (1), Emergency Hardlight Barrier generator (1)

Slipspace: Forerunner Translight Drive (1)

Armor: 60cm Titanium-B Forerunner Battleplate

Length: 600m

Width: 245m

Height: 123m

Armament:

MAC (2)

Archer missile pod (30)

Howler missile pod (30)

34mm Twin Defensive Railgun turret (24)

20mm Hardlight Gun turret (12)

ICWS (Mixture of pulse lasers and rotary cannons)

Shiva Nuclear Warhead missiles (8)

[Accessing Systems Alliance Database, subsection  
Weaponry]

**\*\*Hard Light\*\***

Hard Light technology was invented by the Forerunners. It is capable of generating any type of shape, by creating an object that, for all intents and purposes, is a physical object, but is still made out of energy. Hard light generators can do anything from make a simple bridge, to sustain the body of a Promethean Knight. Immediately after gaining access to Hard Light technology, the UNSC reverse engineered the entirety of the device. One of the many applications Hard Light has found is in weapons. Handheld firearms can use Hard Light to generate different types of "bullets" to fit the situation, making a jack-of-all-trades gun. The same is true for the ship-mounted variety. Both types require a considerable amount of time to charge up, but once they do, it is nearly impossible to run out of power, as they run off of Forerunner Singularity Power Plants.

Hard Light Barriers are installed on ships as emergency shields. Unlike standard Energy shields, Hard Light is impenetrable. It can even resist a shot from a Super MAC. However, it is impossible to drop a small section of the barrier to allow a firing hole, so while a Hard Light Barrier makes a ship invulnerable, it also prevents it from making any offensive action. Hard Light Barriers can be customized during combat to allow for a ramming action. This has proven to be an effective option for ships of sufficient tonnage.

Personal Hard Light generators are standard equipment for N7 Operatives. The limit is truly the imagination, as it allows the operative to create any physical object they can imagine. As the N7 division is a Systems Alliance initiative, the division has a grand total of zero combat deployments. However, in training, N7 operatives have used their Hard Light generators to create blades, riot shields, and guns. In one instance, an N7 operative encased himself in Hard

Light when his shields failed.

[â€|Accessing Systems Alliance Database, Subsection Personnel enhancementsâ€|]

**\*\*Neural Lace\*\***

The Neural Lace was standard equipment for Captains back during the Human-Covenant War. Since then, the design has been streamlined and improved. Neural Laces are standard issue for all UNSC personnel. They allow the instant retrieval and communication of combat-critical data. They are used to coordinate attacks, and essentially turn a combat unit into a semi-collective. This system has been likened to the old 20th century Science Fiction species, the Borg. In truth, it is not so far from the reality. The Commanding officers who use Neural Laces frequently report that they lose sense of individuality when commanding their subordinates, and the death of someone connected to the network is like having a limb cut off. This has led to problems of shock when a team member dies, but overall, the Neural Lace has improved unit cohesion.

Neural Laces are also linked to an extensive cybernetic neural implant, which allows for the uploading of data directly to a person's mind. It also allows an individual to directly interface with computer systems. This allows them to "share" processing power with the computer, boosting inferior computer systems, or bolstering brain power. It is estimated that having a Neural Lace paired with implants increases a person's IQ by at least 50 points. Neural Laces are used extensively by civilians, but they are expensive.

The UNSC has been trying to pressure other branches of the Systems Alliance Military into using Neural Laces, although so far they have been met with failure.

â€|Exiting databaseâ€|

Author's Notes: I hope this chapter came out alright. I've been working on it for a while, and I think it might be even better than "The Bow and the Gun". The two stories are related, and will update in tandem. I promise they won't ever overlap; you won't see an Imperial Star Destroyer bombarding the Citadel, and vice versa. However, I will reference happenings in the other fiction quite regularly.

As always, please review, they are what drives me to write. Feel free to talk to me about my technological comparisons between these two series, I'm always afraid I'll get something wrong.

Also, as a side note, the mass accelerators didn't actually cause any hull breaches. Titanium-B Battleplate is based off of Forerunner alloys, and is invulnerable to all kinetic energy weapons. However, that doesn't mean that they can't cause damage. The Frontier was rendered combat ineffective because the impacts on its armor transferred to the hull. It essentially hemorrhaged to death. Internal bleeding, if you will. It's like being beaten to death.

And I'll try and have some fighter dogfights, but it's going to be kind of hard unless it's a large scale battle. UNSC MAC cannons and energy projectors makes most fights a quick sucker punch. I'll be sure to throw a couple of fighter duels in, though. Get ready to see

a UNSC Supercarrier.

If someone could also calculate the yields of the specified Citadel mass accelerator weaponry, that would be great.

## 2. Chapter 2

\_A/N: Alright, so I've been getting some reviews from readers who were unable to "suspend their disbelief" when reading this storyâ€| you were able to suspend your disbelief when Mass Effect used an alloy capable of generating DARK ENERGY. You suspended disbelief when Cortana told you the Halos were capable of wiping out all sentient life in the GALAXY. You suspend your disbelief even more when you read a CROSSOVER. Yet somehow, minor details in this story are UNPLAUSIBLE? I'm sorry, if you're looking for plausibility or realism, you're in the wrong damn genre.\_

\_That being said, I'll relieve your doubt. The lookalike solar system is only similar to ours by number of planets and having a singular habitable one. Terra is green and blue, like Earth, but the continents are in completely different positions and shapes. The wildlife and fauna are different, and the only thing it shares with Earth is that it's habitable, has levo-based wildlife, and is the third planet from the star.\_

\_Their first planet does not look like Mercury, their fourth planet does not look like Mars(mostly), and they do have gas giants but they look different.\_

\_On to the second matter. The Systems Alliance has no idea how to utilize Eezo. They can't understand the Prothean ship, and as a result, can't reverse engineer any tech that utilizes Eezo. Dark Energy is dangerous, and they don't know how to use it. They already have artificial gravity, stronger weapons, and faster FTL. Even if they knew Eezo could be used this way, why would they do so? It would be downgrading their tech. Can't go FTL in Slipspace either. Lowering the mass of your ship would make Slipspace crush your ship like a tin can. However, I'll throw you guys a bone. They WOULD be interested in Biotics. I don't think they'd expose fetuses to Eezo. The mortality rate is too high for even ONI's tastes, as it outranks even the mortality rate for the SPARTAN project. However, Biotics could be imitated with machineryâ€| those AIs will work it out, oh they will. I went out of my way to give the Alliance anything from the ME-verse because they're already overpowered, but if that prevents you from suspending your disbelief, so be it. You'll be sorry.\_

\_And for those of you who don't believe Slavers could field a Dreadnought, you'd be right. You also must have missed the part where I mentioned that the Hegemony was supporting them.\_

\_And as much as I'd like to do a peaceful First Contact story, do you honestly see that happening? The Council HATES it when people rock the boat. The Turians are just a bit overzealous sometimes. I'm not writing the Council out to be completely retarded. This story actually has a more realistic First Contact situation between these two governments than most stories will give you.\_

\_Oh, and some people are wondering if this is a parodyâ€| in some ways it is. The UNSC ships will be using excessive force when dealing

with enemies, even for the UNSC. Such as an orbital strike to take out one Biotic.\_

\_Lastly, I know there are problems with various facts and statistics of the Systems Alliance, but relax. Read "The Bow and the Gun". If that doesn't answer your questions, I'll address it later on.\_

\_Now that I'm done with my little rant, let's get onto the story.\_

**\*\*Fifty Shades of Overkill\*\***

**\*\*Chapter 2: My Milkshake Brings All the Boys to the Yard (and damn right, they're better than yours)\*\***

"So you're saying that the aliens attacked you first?"

Turian General Septimus Oraka sat across a plain metal table from a captured Batarian slaver in a sterile, stark gray interrogation room.

"Yeah," the slaver glanced nervously around the room, "am I done here?"

"Not quite," the General drummed his fingers on the table, "Can you please go over \_exactly\_ how you ended up in such a situation?"

The slaver groaned, "I've had a terrible day, Turian. Stop with the incessant questions!"

Septimus shrugged, "Alright. I'll just hand you over to my STG friends, then."

The slaver paled as the General stood up to leave.

"No, wait!" the Batarian desperately pleaded, "I'll talk, just don't hand me over to the STG!"

Septimus smiled, sitting back down, "Well, that wasn't that hard, was it? So, tell me what happened."

The Batarian sighed in resignation, "Well, we had just captured a ship full of Quarians who were prospecting for the Migrant fleet. We didn't know that one of the suit rats was actually an Admiral. The Quarians launched a rescue attempt, and made off with our prisoners, including that Admiral. We gave chase in our fleet-"

"Yeah, about that," Septimus interrupted the slaver, "you had a Dreadnought in your fleet. Care to explain where you got it?"

The slaver nervously shifted in his seat, "Uh, we bought it secondhand."

The General's eyes narrowed in skepticism, "You don't just buy a Dreadnought 'secondhand'. Care to be straight with me, or shall I give the STG teams a chance to test their skills?"

The slaver cringed, "Fine. We bought the Dreadnought from the Hegemony," After a few seconds of expectant silence, he added, "at a discounted price."

Septimus digested that little bit of info. So the slaver group was acting as agents of the Hegemony. Interesting.

"Alright," the General nodded, "Continue with your story."

"So we were chasing them," the slaver continued, "when we arrived in the Theta system. We thought we had them cornered, but someone had activated Relay 314! Seeing an escape route, the Quarrians made a hard burn for the Relay. We tried to disable them before they got there, but they were too fast. We debated whether to follow them or not, and finally decided to pursue the vagrants."

The slaver's face distorted into one of horror, "When we came out on the other side, we came face to face with a Dreadnought and Cruiser of alien design."

The General raised a brow, "And you fired on them unprovoked?"

The slaver nodded, "Our captain was convinced that they were Quarrian ships. To be honest, he was never the sharpest blade in the Omnitool, and everyone paid the price."

"Care to explain how your fleet of four Frigates, two Cruisers, and a Dreadnought lost to a single Dreadnought and Cruiser?" Septimus narrowed his eyes. The Batarians lost either because the aliens were immensely powerful, or the slavers were stupid. He hoped it was the latter.

"We fired a full salvo at the Dreadnought, hoping to take it out of the fight. They were trying to communicate with us, and the captain hoped to catch them with their shields down. Their kinetic barriers were more powerful than anything I've ever seen before! It took all of our shots and was only knocked off course! That much firepower would have utterly destroyed a Dreadnought of that size, but it didn't have a scratch on it!"

The Batarian dropped his head into his hands, "The captain ordered every ship to fire our full complement of Disruptor Torpedoes and mass accelerators. The battle was over in less than a minute. The alien Dreadnought had two bow-mounted spinal cannons, and it vaporized our Dreadnought, but only after they used some sort of energy beam to punch straight through the hull. The alien Cruiser used a similarly-powerful spinal cannon to decimate two of our Cruisers. They fired so many missiles that our GARDIAN systems crashed just trying to track them all. I don't know how the other two Frigates perished. I was on an escape pod before the missiles hit us. After that, the two surviving Frigates headed to their garden worldâ€¦"

"Did you inflict any casualties?" Septimus asked, a chill running down his spine. Energy weapons! No wonder they were decimated, kinetic barriers couldn't block DEWs.

"Only one," groaned the Batarian, "the alien Cruiser. We couldn't breach its hull, but they were abandoning ship. The Dreadnought had some hull breaches, and I'm sure we disabled most of its systems, but it was still using small caliber guns to pepper our Frigates. I didn't see it myself, but before the last Frigates were destroyed, they were reporting that they engaged a Dreadnought 2.5 kilometers in

length."

Septimus was frozen solid. 2.5 kilometers?! That was bigger than the Destiny Ascension!

"I see," the General forced himself to remain calm, "Well, your friends gave a different story. They said that the aliens fired on you unprovoked. So I hope you don't mind, but you'll be joining them with STG to confirm your story."

"No," the slaver paled in horror and fear, as two soldiers grabbed him by his arms, "You said you wouldn't!" the Batarian managed a strangled cry, "You Turian bastard, you said you wouldn't!"

The slaver's screams trailed off as he was dragged away into the depths of the Turian Dreadnought \_Palaven's Harbinger\_.

As Septimus Oraka walked onto the CIC of his Dreadnought, the crewmen saluted him before going back to their duties. In the center of the room, a holographic representation of the fleet was being projected. At the request of STG, his strike group had been pulled from fleet maneuvers to assess exactly what the situation was, and if need be, to exercise the might of the Council.

"Ah, General," his aide saluted him, "the Asari Cruiser \_Cybaen\_ has just arrived in system. They're requesting to speak with you."

"I'll take it in the comm room," Septimus replied, heading off to receive the call.

In the circular, angular comm room, Septimus faced the holographic projector as it sparked to life, displaying a young Asari.

"Ah, General Septimus. I am Captain Tazia of the Cruiser \_Cybaen\_." the Asari smiled, "I trust things have been pleasant so far?"

The General nodded, "So far. The Batarians all gave conflicting reports, so I'm having STG confirm their accounts."

The Asari winced, "May the Goddess have mercy on their souls. What accounts were you given?"

General Septimus shrugged, "Well, they certainly made contact with some alien race. Their accounts vary on who actually fired first, but I'm inclined to believe the slavers did."

Septimus shuddered, "What I'm worried about is their accounts of a directed energy weapon. It's consistent enough to be true."

Captain Tazia became deeply concerned, "A directed energy weapon?"

"Yes," Septimus nodded, "Some sort of particle-beam weapon. It punched straight through the slaver's Dreadnought, completely bypassing their kinetic barriers."

Tazia cringed, "Did you determine if they're hostile?"

"The aliens?" the General shook his head, "We don't know yet. Some of the slavers say that the aliens fired first, and one of them says

that they fired first. We don't know who fired the first shot yet."

"Well, let's hope they're peaceful," Tazia sighed, "If they join the Council, they could be a great boon. If they invade, it will be a long and bloody war."

"Spirits help us, if that happens we might have to have the Krogan assist," Septimus shook his head in frustration, "and I'm not entirely sure they will."

The General returned his gaze to the Asari captain, "So in light of recent developments, what reinforcements are being sent?"

"You might be surprised," Tazia grinned, "the Council is devoting ten Frigate wolf-packs, seventy Cruisers, and a few Dreadnoughts."

Septimus was impressed. His small fleet only consisted of a single Dreadnought, ten Cruisers, and two packs of six Frigates apiece. With the reinforcements he would be receiving, he could handle anything the Galaxy could throw at him!

"That's not the best part," Tazia was amused at the shocked expression on Septimus's face, "the \_Destiny Ascension\_ is en route."

The General was floored. The Council was coming here in the \_Destiny Ascension\_?! That thing was barely out of the shipyards, and already its might was to be tested! Was this First Contact really so important that the Council themselves had to come, and bring the most powerful ship in Citadel space?!

"That seems like overkill," Septimus bluntly muttered, "This seems like a gross misallocation of resources."

Tazia just grinned, "There's no such thing as overkill, General. Only victory. Besides, you'll want all the ships you can get your hands on if you have to fight directed energy weapons."

He nodded. Yes, if it came to blows, he would want to remove the particle-beam from the equation as soon as possible. If the slavers were telling the truth, the fleet he would have would be more than enough to wipe out the remaining damaged Dreadnought.

Even so, he hoped that a peaceful resolution could be reached. Nobody wanted another Rachni war. The Turian military were the protectors of the Galaxy, and after all, prevention is the best protection in the Universe.

**\*\*[Outer Shanxi System, Alliance space]\*\***

Nobody could see it as a small corvette-sized craft dropped out of FTL, and raised its thermal and optical cloak. It drifted dead towards Shanxi and began using its passive scanners to get an image of the system, which it would then transmit back to its base using a Quantum Entanglement Communicator. The inhabitants of the vessel weren't sure what to make of the system's inhabitants.

They had yet to reach a consensus.



\*\*[Inner Shanxi System, Alliance space, April 15\*\*\*\*th\*\*\*\*,  
2590]\*\*

The Hephaestus-class Cradle was the UNSC-designed orbital construction vessel. Replacing the old Cradle, the Hephaestus-class was about twice the size of the original, and was capable of Slipspace transit. Granted, its sublight engines were about as slow as glacial drift, but it wasn't meant to be fast. It was meant to build and repair. It was wide, and completely enclosed. It could build a Nexus-class Cruiser from scratch in 18 hours flat. It could swallow a gutted Infinity-class Carrier, and using a combination of UNSC, Covenant, and Forerunner technology, have it repaired and factory-fresh within 24 hours.

Compared to that, repairing a Rome-class Frigate was simply child's play.

The \_Frontier\_ sat within the bowels of the Hephaestus-class Cradle \_Stellar Forge\_, as Huragok and Forerunner Constructor Sentinel drones (or FCSO for short) scurried about inside. As fast as lightning, they were repairing structural damage and replacing crippled systems. Within a few hours, the crew of the \_Frontier\_ would have their home back.

This astounding marvel of scientific engineering was dwarfed by the fleet strewn about the Shanxi system. Over a thousand ships of varying design drifted in, around, and far from Shanxi. A Kig-Yar Destroyer lazily drifted around the colony's moon, as twelve CSO-class Supercarriers stood vanguard over the Mass Relay. Escorting the Supercarriers was a rabble of UNSC and SE designed Frigates, Destroyers, Cruisers, and Carriers. In orbit of Shanxi, hundreds upon hundreds of Assault Carriers and Infinity-class Carriers were dropping ODPS which they had towed through Slipspace. Many Cruisers and Carriers were landing ground forces on the small colony, reinforcing its defenses. Corvettes patrolled the remainder of the space.

The Shanxi system was under military lockdown.

Every gun within a light year had several million firing solutions prepped and ready on possible approach vectors out of the Relay. MAC and Plasma Torpedo capacitors were charged and ready. Archer and Howler pods were cooking, Railgun turrets were scanning for targets, Pulse Turrets glowed with energy, Hard Light guns shone with an inner light, shields were ready to activate at a moment's notice, Needler turrets were fully loaded, and every ship was ready to throw insane amounts of firepower in any direction they so desired.

The Systems Alliance was ready for war.

\*\*[\*\*\_\*\*Angelwing\*\*\_\*\*, Comm room]\*\*

Captain Kari Heartnet stood facing the holographic image of Admiral Kastanie Drescher of the Systems Alliance Second Fleet. Both had the obvious expression of dread on their faces, as they both suspected the worse.

"This report is accurate?" the Admiral asked seriously. Kari nodded.

"Yes, ma'am. Their spinal mass drivers were able to drop our shields and seriously damage internal systems. I'm not worried about those weapons though; what I'm concerned about is the gravity weapons they displayed during the battle."

Kastanie frowned, "Describe these to me again."

Kari used her neural relay to bring up data scans of the missile weapon the aliens used, "They were about the size of an Archer , and moved about as quickly. We could intercept them long range, but as the Spirit of Fire experienced, their small corvette-analogues like to fire them at closer ranges than our CIWS mounts can respond to. It is imperative that when fighting these aliens, that any missiles they launched be intercepted. When they impacted on our shields, they detonated, creating a gravitational distortion that tore entire swaths off of our armor belt."

"It tore Titanium-B Armor plating?!" Admiral Drescher was shocked. Titanium-B was a mixture of honeycombed Titanium-A battleplate coated and mixed with a special forerunner alloy, and threaded with carbon nanotubes. It was virtually indestructible, and could take a point-blank Super-MAC round, and emerge unscathed. Sure, the inside of the ship would be mulched, but that was simply a case of insufficient inertial dampening; there was no fault in the armor. The only weapons capable of doing any significant damage to it were Plasma-stream turrets and Energy Projectors. Plasma torpedoes could also hurt it, but the damage was usually cosmetic.

Kari shook her head, "No, we recovered and reattached the armor plate later. The gravitational distortion tore the armor off of its mountings."

Kastanie sighed in relief. The armor was designed to be ejected in the event of an emergency, and the mounting was significantly weaker than the armor itself.

"That's a relief. Has your ship sustained any lasting damage?" the Admiral asked out of concern.

"Not at all, Admiral. The Huragok and Constructor Drones fixed up our ship quite nicely."

Kastanie smiled slightly at that. When they had arrived on the scene, the Angelwing was venting atmosphere and drifting in a debris field of its own hull and armor. Many of the weapon mounts had been smashed, and the engines were barely functioning. Thirty years ago, it would have been committed to dry-dock for a few months. At the very least, a Cradle would have patched it up. Nowadays, though, the UNSC, and by extension the rest of the Systems Alliance, had access to the Huragok, who were more than delighted to fix everything from a gutted Cruiser to a broken elevator. They could repair a slagged Warthog in 10 minutes flat; not that the UNSC used Warthogs anymore. They used Pumas.

Helping the Huragoks were Sentinel Constructor Drones. Sentinels already possessed the ability to make repairs, and the Constructor Drone was just a specialized version of that. It didn't have the dexterity of the Huragok, nor the intelligence, but they worked tirelessly, and they could work anywhere. Together, the Huragok and

the Drones were an unstoppable force of maintenance. Battle damage trembled in their presence and scorches pleaded for their lives as well, things got fixed. Fast.

"I'm surprised at the number of ODPs you brought, Admiral," Kari commented nonchalantly, "I honestly didn't think we could make them that fast."

"We can't," Kastanie corrected her, "These 50 ODPs are from the Terra Defense Grid."

Kari looked shocked, "You took them from Terra? Wouldn't that leave the planet?" she laughed, "Actually, that makes sense. Terra's defenses always seemed a bit overkill to me anyways."

Kastanie smiled confidently, "Exactly, they can spare the ODPs. Some might say the reinforcements I brought is a bit much for the situation. They called it overkill, misappropriation of force," Kastanie looked Kari directly in the eye, "but I think we both know that we'd rather have them and not need them, than the other way around."

"Exactly, ma'am," Kari chuckled, "any word from the UEG?"

"No," Kastanie replied, "we sent a courier ship about an hour ago. We're still waiting for a reply."

Kastanie turned to look at something off screen, muttering, "Speak of the devil!"

Another hologram leapt to life, showing the familiar form of a Forerunner Monitor, "Ah, Reclaimer Admiral Drescher! I am 1304 Iridescent Vortex, Ambassador for the remnants of the Forerunner Ecumene."

Kari smirked at the quirky AI, "Glad you could join us, Iridescent."

1304 Iridescent Vortex was a Forerunner Monitor that a Deep Space Exploration team found a few years ago. It was in possession of a sizable collection of Forerunner ships, many of which were Keyships.

The Ark was possibly the best thing that could happen to mankind. With it, Humanity no longer needed to reverse-engineer technology from Requiem, no, they had direct access to all of the blueprints and archival information from the Forerunner Ecumene, as well as a construction facility capable of building any ship in the Forerunner Navy.

"I must say," Iridescent spoke up, "the prospect of meeting another civilization is quite thrilling! I have never done so in person."

"Just hope they decide to think twice before shooting at us," Kari said, thinking of the hundreds of ships patrolling the Shanxi system, "otherwise we might have to actually wage war."

"Of course," Iridescent nodded, "I stand by your side in whatever action is necessary, Reclaimer."

The hologram of Iridescent vanished as his Battleship moved into the blockade around the Relay.

"Off the record," Kastanie began, "do you think we stepped in some deep shit here?"

Kari thought for a moment before replying, "I think so. Barely two years old and our little Alliance is already looking at war."

"Well, growing pains are inevitable," Kastanie sighed, "stay vigilant, Captain."

"You too, Admiral."

The communication was cut, plunging the comm room into darkness, as Kari turned around and left.

\*\*[Shanxi, \*\*\_\*\*Toyya\*\*\_\*\* crash site]\*\*

"Mother of Godâ€¦|" a young marine swore before retching into a nearby pile of rubble.

The alien ship that had crashed was completely demolished. Almost nothing intact remained, not even the bodies. Arms, legs, torsos, and the occasional head were littered around the pieces of burning machinery. Purplish blood was splattered all over the place. It was a very macabre scene.

"Looks like the entire ship broke up on impact," Mut said over the radio as he watched the entire scene over the neural net, "Damn shame."

One of the older ODSTs nudged one of the alien's heads, which was encased in a helmet. It had a purple face mask, along with a small circular aperture on the bottom. Some sort of hood/veil covered the top. The alien's neck was a bloody mess, severed by a large piece of the ship's bulkhead. The rest of the body lay sprawled over the ground, one of its arms almost detached, hanging by bits of flesh and cloth. Scenes like this absolutely coated the ground.

"They're all in spacesuits," he observed, "Did they not have life support on their ship?"

"I wouldn't be surprised," Mut mused, "I'm shocked that thing was space-worthy."

"Over here!" a Sangheili Spec Ops soldier called out, "I've found something!"

The ODST, Marine, and several other soldiers, including a Mgalekgolo, made their way over to the area the Spec Ops soldier was indicating. A large, cylindrical pod was lying half buried beneath the rubble. It had a visible door, which was closed. Thrusters on one side weakly fired, ineffectually nudging the craft.

"Is that an escape pod?" the Marine asked quizzically.

"Looks like it," the ODST replied.

The Mgalekgolo scanned the pod with a device on its right arm, before rumbling, "The vehicle has inertial dampeners. They are functioning."

"So there could be survivors in there?" an Unngoy wondered.

"Rescue is top priority," Mut squawked over the Battle-Net.

The Sangheili tapped on the hatch. After a minute of silence, he sighed, "Nothing. If they are alive then they are unconscious."

"Shall I open the hatch?" the Mgalekgolo proposed, brandishing his Fuel Rod cannon.

"No need," the Spec Ops waved the Hunter away, "I have a sword."

With a **\*\*SNAP-HISS\*\***, the Sangheili cut a shallow circle around the hatch. He grasped the handle, and with a grunt of exertion, tore the weakened hatch right off, throwing it off to the side.

The Marine whistled in appreciation, "What gym do you go to?"

The ODS'T chuckled, "Don't even think about it, Marine, you wouldn't make it past the front door."

The entire group peered into the small pod. Inside, two individuals were leaning against the sides, obviously unconscious. They were humanoid, wearing the same type of purple/black environmental suits. One was female, and the other was male.

What set them apart was that their hands had three fingers each and they possessed digitgrade legs.

"Holy shitâ€¦" the Marine breathed.

"We found two survivors," the ODS'T reported, "you're probably going to want to get a xeno-biologist ready."

**\*\*[Location Unknown, Time Unknown]\*\***

Tali'Zorah nar Rayya struggled to regain consciousness. Everything hurt, and she was pretty sure one of her arms had a fracture. Through hazy vision she could see that her HUD was displaying the presence of several ruptures in the suit. Beyond her visor, she could see the faint outlines of faces. Had she been rescued?

No, as her vision cleared, she could tell that the suit no longer had any contact with the arm and leg portions of her suit. In fact, they had been completely removed. Also, the facesâ€¦ they weren't Quarian! The skin tone was all wrong!

Instantly, any remaining grogginess was gone, and Tali was afraid, panicked, and on high alert.

She attempted to move her arms and legs, only to find that they were strapped down. The aliens around her noticed her activity, and started saying something in their language, while motioning for her to calm down.

She flopped back down onto the bed, and tried to take in her surroundings.

She was in a sterile, white room, surrounded by aliens in white clothing. Tali guessed that this was a medical bay, and she was being treated for injuries—how did she get injured in the first place?

Suddenly, it all came back to her; the escape, the running, and the explosion.

The other engineers had been saying that the captain had met a new species, right before the fuel tanks exploded.

Everything had been on fire, and Tali stumbled her way to one of the escape pods with one of the other surviving engineers. For some reason or another, the pod wouldn't launch, so Tali forced the inertial dampeners and mass effect field generator to activate, and held on for the ride. The impact had knocked her out cold, but apparently she survived.

The aliens who were treating her looked a bit like Quarians, only their hands had five fingers each, and their skin tone seemed to vary from light brown to dark brown. One of the aliens, who appeared to be a female, slowly undid the restraints holding her arms. Both looked in to each other's eyes, and understood that there was to be no more outbursts.

After all the straps were undone, Tali sat up and looked around. The room was filled with other medical beds, and a sizable collection of medical equipment.

Keelah, the Flotilla would kill for that stuff.

Tali looked herself over once. Her suit was intact, except for the fact that someone had removed the coverings for her legs and arms. That was a problem.

Tali frantically gestured to her arms and legs. The nurse (Tali was pretty sure she was a nurse) took a couple of seconds to catch on, and with a glint of recognition, pulled the coverings out from under the bed.

Tali frantically tried to put them on, while checking her HUD for infection alerts.

Surprisingly, there were none.

In fact, the air in that room was completely free of bacteria. How was that possible?

The nurse gestured to herself and said something in a different language, "Human", and pointed to the other medical personnel, restating "Human" each time.

Tali understood; that was their species name.

She pointed at herself, saying clearly, "Quarian."

The nurse smiled, pleased that some form of communication was possible.

A new individual entered their group. She looked like a tall Human, with shoulder length hair, pale complexion, and striking blue eyes.

In factâ€¦ were those eyes glowing?!

The nurse pointed to the newcomer, saying, "\_Android\_".

Tali felt a chill go down her spine. Something wasn't right about this newcomer. This new female was physically identical to the others, why would the species name be different? Also, those glowing blue eyesâ€¦

Her suspicions were confirmed when the newcomer extended a hand in greeting. Her suit's sensitive auditory filters were able to pick up the almost imperceptible noise.

The sound of servos.

"AI!" Tali screamed, activating her Omni-Blade, and swung at the robot.

\*\*[\*\*\_\*\*Guardian\*\*\_\*\*, Medical Bay]\*\*

The AI of the \_Guardian\_ was a 7th Generation Smart AI, modeled off the neural pathways of an unfortunate Harvard student who died in a freak car accident. Deciding that such potential shouldn't be wasted, the UNSC used her brain to make an AI.

Advances in AI construction methods had progressed to the point where most of the memories from the brain were intact. Katherine remembered what she was like as a human; what food she liked, her favorite color, who her family was, and her life goals. But they were like facts written in history; they had no meaning to her. Her personality as a human was lost forever, murdered by some idiot driver gazing through beer goggles. So Katherine vowed to live her new life to its fullest, and to honor the life that had lost so that she could live.

And she couldn't do that if her mainframe was cleaved in half by some half-crazed alien in an environmental suit.

Thought processes moving at the speed of light, Katherine saw the approach of the weapon, and made several hundred theories as to what it could be. A weapon stored in subspace? Could the transparency be a result of phasing the blade out of reality slightly? Was it Hard-Light?

A quick scan using a high-intensity beam lasting less than a millisecond revealed that the weapon was a flash-forged silicon-carbide blade, hard as diamond, and suspended in a gravitational field.

Well, it was just matter. Good. It would yield to Hard-Light.

Katherine activated the Hard Light Generator built into her right

arm, and materialized a shield covering her hand. Quick as lightning, her hand shot out and grabbed the incoming blade, barely a second after it began its movement. The alien tried to force the blade past the Hard Light, shouting out words like "\_Bosh'tet\_" and "\_Geth\_".

In a nanosecond, Katherine hacked into the device mounted on the alien's arm. The operating system was completely foreign, so she wasn't able to discern much about the functions of the device, but she was able to identify the piece of Hardware that acted as the power supply.

Bingo.

With barely any mental exertion, she shut off the power source, snuffing out the lattice of orange holograms surrounding the alien's arm. The blade still remained, distorting the surrounding air with its residual heat as it sat in Katherine's Hard-Light-gloved hand. With a flick of her wrist, she tossed it onto the floor, where it clattered under another bed.

"Maybe now we can talk like civilized people, Hmm?" Katherine was completely unfazed, and her tone of voice reflected that. She watched as the alien attempted to do something with the wrist device. After a few seconds of unresponsiveness, the alien glared at Katherine.

She recognized something in those eyes; Anger, fear, and no small amount of wariness. Katherine wondered why that outburst only happened after she introduced herself.

Well, she came here to help break the language barrier; no sense in delaying that any further.

Pointing to herself, she said her name, "Katherine."

She pointed to one of the staff, "Samuel."

Then she pointed to the alien, with an expectant look on her face.

After a couple of seconds, the alien stated her name, "â€|Tali'Zorah nar Rayyaâ€|"

Katherine smiled. Now they could call Tali'Zorah by her name, rather than by just "Alien". It was a start.

\*\*[Shanxi, Orbit]\*\*

Floating at the center of the response fleet was the Systems Alliance Flagship. Sitting pretty at a remarkable 56 kilometers, the \_Arcturus\_ was the first of eight planned Cortana-class Super Dreadnoughts. It had been constructed at the Ark before colonization, and represented a harmonious union of different design philosophies.

It bore more resemblance to Forerunner vessels than anything else, but the different influences were obvious. Curving lines graced the usually geometric craft, and seemingly superfluous bits on the top gave it a bit of an artistic flare, characteristic of Sangheili ships. From a distance, the ship looked rectangular and utilitarian



in nature, hinting at Human design.

Up close, it was wonderful. It had a 10km long, thick head, like a whale, with a relatively thin, but still thick, neck that stretched for 12km. The rest of the ship was all wavy, geometric, and blocky. The whole clash of design philosophies may seem odd when described, but it just worked.

The armament was about as varied as its architecture. The 10km head was built around a spinal MAC, bigger than any MAC in existence. They called it the Ragnarok Cannon. It fired a 6,000-ton round of Ferric-Tungsten with a depleted-uranium core at 24,000 kilometers a second. It impacted with more force than most physicists cared to calculate, and if aimed at a planet could probably wipe life from its surface faster than a glassing. Analysts had called the weapon, "A waste of taxpayer money on overkill". Alliance captains just salivated at the thought of commanding such a vessel. Supplementing the Ragnarok were Energy Projectors, which numbered in the double digits. Plasma Torpedo and Plasma Stream guns were strewn about the ship, numbering in the hundreds and nearing a thousand. Thousands of secondary rail gun turrets, pulse lasers, heavy deck guns, Needler turrets, torpedo tubes, missile racks, and other weaponry made the Cortana-class a beast of a ship in battle. Back at Terra, a Forerunner Design Seed was in production to create another such Dreadnought, but so far, the Alliance only had the resources to support one such vessel.

The Arcturus acted as the central command for the response fleet, which included ships from the First and Second fleet. Flanking it were the flagships for both the Second and First Fleet. The two were both Everest-class Dreadnoughts, named after late Admiral Cole's Valiant-class Heavy Cruiser Everest.

They were essentially revamped models of the Infinity-class ships. They were about twice as deadly, and worth about four Nexus-class Cruisers.

In the comm room of the Arcturus, Admiral Kastanie Drescher and Admiral Steven Hackett stood before the Systems Alliance Council, 1304 Iridescent Vortex, and the Director of ONI, Doctor Catherine Halsey. Admiral Hackett and Dr. Halsey were old beyond what Humans should have been capable of, but advancements in medical technology made the Human lifespan indefinite. Admiral Drescher was significantly younger, and so was the Council.

Besides Halsey and Vortex, who represented the original UNSC and the Forerunner Ecumene, everyone there was part of the Systems Alliance.

"Absolutely not!" the male Sangheili Councilor, Karn'Todom, shouted in anger, "These aliens attacked an Alliance world unprovoked! The blood of soldiers was spilt! Such an act demands vengeance!"

"Calm yourself, Karn," Admiral Hackett tried to ease the tension, "I too mourn for the twelve servicemen and women who lost their lives on board the Frontier, but we must not let this incident define our future relationships with this new species!"

"I agree," Halsey chipped in, "you might have fought a rogue faction. Judging an entire civilization by the acts of a few is a mistake you

cannot afford to make."

Tan, the Kig-Yar Councilor, snorted in scorn, "Even if we did assume a hostile stance against this new civilization, it would not hurt us much. Their ships were pitifully tiny."

"Even so," Vortex cut in, "you do not yet know the ship classifications of this new species. Those ships could be considered anything from fighters to dreadnoughts."

"Councilors, perhaps committing the Arcturus to Shanxi's defense is a bit overkill?" Kastanie voiced her concerns, "If we lose the Arcturus, the Alliance will fall apart."

"Exactly," Karn snarled, "The Arcturus is the strongest ship in Alliance space. If it cannot handle any threat thrown at it, we cannot succeed in this war."

"Now hold on just a minute," Halsey spoke out, "you're acting like you're already at war!"

"It is regrettable," one of the Human councilors, Tim, sighed, "but their attack was clearly an act of war. If we are not decisive, we could lose our edge."

"There is another matter," Vortex spoke up suddenly, "my ship was able to detect large amounts of dust-form Element Zero in the debris field of the alien vessels."

Everyone stared in shock at Vortex, with the exception of Halsey, who appeared intrigued.

"Element Zero, huh?" Halsey mused, "I wonder how they managed to utilize it."

"Does it matter?" Karn shouted, "The Dark Energy that Element Zero creates is hazardous. Surely only a barbaric race would utilize it, and their actions reinforce that theory."

"I agree, Karn," Vortex bobbed, "my makers were similarly concerned about the existence of such an element. The expedition force that was sent to this galaxy, before they dropped out of contact, reported the existence of Element Zero in the Terra System. I do not know for certain what course of action they took, but I suspect they made every attempt to neutralize the threat."

"Well, it was only deemed dangerous when the Alliance couldn't find a use for it. I understand the dangers of Dark Energy, but perhaps the technological advancements that come from it mitigate the risks?" Halsey interjected.

"Now wait just a minute," Tim spoke up, a bit irritated, "Are we discussing technological theory, or are we responding to an attack on one of our colonies, because you had me fooled for a bit there."

Halsey glared at Tim.

"As rude as that was," Admiral Kastanie announced, "Tim is right. What do we do to the next aliens to come through that Relay?"

"Blast them out of the sky!" the female Kig-Yar Councilor screeched, "Make sure they understand the might of our technology!"

Admiral Hackett huffed in frustration, "There are multiple ship designs that obviously belong to different species! We can't fire on them all indiscriminately!"

The Kig-Yar stared at Hackett as if he was stupid, "Of course I wasn't suggesting that. Why did you think I was?"

"Speaking of the aliens," Halsey cut in, "how are the two survivors holding up?"

"The male is in a coma," Kastanie supplied, "The female has regained consciousness. She seems to be wary of us, and harbors distrust of the Guardian's AI, Katherine. She has even gone so far as to attack Katherine's mobile platform with some sort of holographic device that manufactures blades."

Hackett cast a glance at Kastanie, muttering, "A hologram that creates blades?"

"We're working on understanding the device," Kastanie continued, "but that process is about as slow as our translation efforts."

"Hard to create a translation matrix when you're working in a near-cultural vacuum, huh?" Halsey remarked.

"We've got simple things like names," Kastanie shrugged, "but sentence conjugation and verbs are a bit beyond us right now."

"They also have a pitiful immune system," Vortex chirped, "I'm surprised that a species like that could evolve."

Kastanie cast a wary glance at 1304 Iridescent Vortex, "Where did you get that information?"

Vortex spun in a circle, "I am constantly connected to your Battle-net, Construct Katherine is more than happy to provide me with relevant data."

Accepting that explanation, Kastanie looked back to the Council, "Anyways, we should identify any more ships that come through. If they belong to the hostile species, then we'll open fire, but I think we should try hailing all incoming ships before engaging in hostilities."

"That sounds reasonable," Tim thoughtfully rubbed his chin stubble, "all in favor?"

The decision was unanimous.

"It is decided then," Karn smiled, "do your duty, Admirals."

As both Admiral Kastanie and Hackett left, they both had the same thought; Civilian officials had no business calling the shots in military operations. It took them four times as long to reach the conclusion they had in the first place.

**\*\*[This is Reporter Thomas Blackburn, here with Terra News! This just in, First Contact has occurred near the colony of Shanxi, and boy, did it go to shit faster than a MAC gun! The entirety of the Second and First fleets have been deployed to Shanxi, to make a show of force. Human Councilor Tim commented, "The Alliance is a force to be dealt with, and we have to be sure to show the galaxy just who they're dealing with."]\*\***

The Alliance Battle-net was humming with communications, when it suddenly started screaming. Long-range sensors picked up a small corvette-sized ship near the outer planets. The tiny craft was bombarded with hails as multiple Cruisers and Frigates spun up their Slipspace drives in preparation for intercept duties.

To the relief of almost everyone, the ship responded to their hailsâ€¦ in binary.

Instantly, the collective AIs of the First and Second Fleet immediately replied in kind, and the two collections of programs communed in ways only computers could.

Within ten seconds, relevant data was exchanged, and both sides were excited, each for different reasons.

The AIs of the Alliance were ecstatic. An entire race of artificial intelligences developing independently from any sort of organic masters. This was the sort of thing that was theorized, but rarely tried.

The Geth were intrigued. A civilization of organics and synthetics existing in harmony, where synthetic life is treated as equals, and seen as partners. This was the sort of thing that they never thought could happen. Consensus was reached throughout the entire collective. They would establish relations with this new race, and it would usher in a golden age between synthetics and organics.

At least, they hoped it would.

Light years away, a fleet of Geth Dreadnoughts, Cruisers, and Frigates entered FTL, en-route to the Shanxi system. Even as they did so, the Geth and the Alliance began working out the terms of their relationship.

The collective waited with much anticipation.

**\*\*[Guardian, Medical bay]\*\***

The synthetic, Katherine, stopped trying to communicate with Tali, and appeared to zone out. The young Quarian huffed in annoyance. She was trying to be patient and cooperate with this synthetic, the least it could do was pay attention to her!

After just a moment, the synthetic appeared to cheer up, and began to speak again. Only this time it was speaking in a language that her translator actually understood; Ancient Khelish.

"Can you understand me?" the synthetic asked expectantly.

"Yes, I can," Tali warily replied, "where did you learn Khelish?"

"We just made contact with another spacefaring civilization," Katherine explained excitedly, "An entire race of artificial intelligences! Who would have thought?"

Tali felt a chill go down her spine. She had a pretty good idea what that synthetic was talking about.

"You don't mean to tell me you were contacted by the Geth?" Tali was close to hysterical.

"Yes! They referred to your species as their creators. I haven't received the relevant historical yet, but—" Katherine's expression fell, and she clasped Tali's hands in one sudden motion with a sympathetic expression on her face, "I'm so sorry your people had to go through something like that!" Suddenly she leaned in, expression darkening, "Genocide is still inexcusable, though, even if it failed."

Tali was on the verge of freaking out. She didn't care that these people probably saved her life, if that synthetic touched her, or even approached her \_one more time\_, someone was going to get hurt.

In fact, fuck it; she'd start hurting people right now.

The next few minutes consisted of flailing, screaming, punches, and frantic cries of "Security to the Medbay!"

\*\*[Theta System, Citadel Space, 4,16,2157]\*\*

The fleet approaching Relay 314 was truly an impressive display of the Council's power. 72 Frigates, 80 Cruisers, and four Dreadnoughts were led by the imposing \_Destiny Ascension\_. 157 ships in total approached the Relay at a hard burn, Mass Effect fields at maximum, engines at full, kinetic barriers at maximum, and all weapons charged. Fighters sat in launch bays, ready to charge into battle at a moment's notice.

\*\*[\*\*\_\*\*Destiny Ascension\*\*\_\*\*, Bridge]\*\*

Two Turian voices crackled over the comm.

"This is General Desolas Arterius of the Dreadnought \_Predator\_, reporting in. Drive cores are green, fleet is ready to transition to FTL."

"General Septimus Oraka of the Dreadnought \_Palaven's Harbinger\_, reporting. We're all ready to go."

"This is Matriarch Ciana T'Nari," a decorated Asari Admiral announced on the bridge of the Destiny Ascension, "Today we will make history. We are about to make First Contact with another spacefaring civilization who, if reports are to be believed, are no pushovers when it comes to combat. We don't expect hostilities, but if they attack, you all know your duties. The word of the Council is law, and we are here to show that even newcomers to the galactic stage are subject to the Council's wisdom. Stay focused, keep a straight head, and perhaps we might be home in time for dinner."

As Ciana terminated the fleet-wide communications, each ship transmitted their mass to the Relay. Arcs of lightning leapt out and engulfed the entire fleet, and the collection of Asari, Turian, and Salarian ships vanished in an instant.

\*\*[Accessing Systems Alliance Database, Subsection Noncombatant Shipsâ€¦]\*\*

**\*\*Hephaestus-class Cradle\*\***

The Hephaestus-class Cradle is a UNSC-designed repair/refit/production station capable of inter-system travel. At 26.4 km long and 10.6 km high/wide, it is twice the size of the UNSC \_Cradle\_ used in the Battle of Sigma Octanus IV. This ship has a fairly weak armament consisting of purely point defense guns, but this is not a ship meant for combat. It has the ability to construct multiple ships at a time within its interior, using a conglomeration of technology. Construction time has been considerably reduced, due to the advancements provided by Forerunner technology. Primitive Design Seeds use a combination of Hard Light and prefabricators to construct a ship's superstructure within a matter of minutes, after which Constructor Drones and Huragok outfit the ship with the necessary weapons systems and equipment, all of which are manufactured on the spot by Design Seeds. A Forerunner Translight Drive enables the Hephaestus-class to travel to other systems as fast as a frigate, but its sublight engines have pitiful acceleration, which is easily bested by old freighters. The Cradles also lack shielding.

\*\*[Accessing Systems Alliance Database, Subsection Sangheili, Subsection Weapons technologyâ€¦]\*\*

**\*\*Plasmastream Turret\*\***

Invented by the UNSC AI Cortana, the Plasmastream Turret is simply a very robust Plasma Torpedo turret. By shaping the magnetic fields differently, the weapon is able to fire the plasma in a continuous stream, akin to a blowtorch. Shields quickly fall under such firepower, and it is only surpassed in the energy weapon department by Energy Projectors. However, Plasmastream weapons suffer from a lack of range, requiring a minimum distance of 10km before energy diffraction becomes a problem.

**\*\*Needler Turret\*\***

Needlers are nothing new. The ship version simply fires huge three meter shards of pink crystalline material. The projectiles track nearby enemy vessels not broadcasting the correct IFF signal, and impale the target. If enough are in close proximity when embedded in the target, they detonate, usually resulting in the target vessel's demise.

\*\*[Accessing Systems Alliance Database, Subsection UNSC, Subsection AI equipmentâ€¦]\*\*

**\*\*Mobile Platforms\*\***

Not a new concept by any means, AI mobile platforms are simply android bodies designed for use by AIs. In appearance, the only way to tell them apart from humans is the faint glowing that the eyes

give off. Inside the body is housed a crystalline matrix capable of independently supporting a Generation 5 AI and beyond. Also equipped is a Hard Light Generator, Personal Shield Generator, Miniature Forerunner Singularity Power Plant, various sensors, and Quantum Entanglement Communicator.

\*\*[Accessing Systems Alliance Database, Subsection UNSC, Subsection Shipsâ€¦]\*\*

\*\*Cortana-class Dreadnought\*\*

Most data concerning the Cortana-class is classified. The Systems Alliance only has one functioning, which is the Arcturus. It is estimated at 56 kilometers, and incorporates all known technology in existence. It has an unknown number of Cruisers, Frigates, and Corvettes in internal hangar bays. On long-term deployments, it can mine and produce its own munitions, ships, and equipment. It has food production facilities on board. It is estimated that the Cortana-class can operate without any outside assistance for about two years.

\*\*[Warning, data stream interruptedâ€¦ incoming transmissionâ€¦]\*\*

Ah, hello! You are our new friends, the Geth, am I correct? I am Cromwell, a 7th generation AI. We would appreciate it if you didn't go snooping about our databases. Just ask us, and we'll send you all relevant, unclassified files, alright? Have a nice day.

\*\*[Connection terminated.]\*\*

A/N: I busted my ass to write this incredibly long chapter. You're welcome. With this, my SW/Halo Crossover and my ME/Halo crossover now have comparable word countsâ€¦ Weird. Anyways, I'm going to update "The Bow and the Gun" next. Oh, and if you were wondering what the Spirit of Fire is doing, it's back planetside.

### 3. Chapter 3 Rewrite

A/N: So I've been inundated with enough messages of discontent regarding the direction this fic took that I feel that it is time for a rewrite. The latter half of this chapter has been changed, and the story will head in a different, more sensible direction. I'm also implementing Paragon/Renegade choices that you can vote on. Like the game, the brief description of the choice might not accurately represent what you're actually choosing, so be careful what you vote for. Whichever choice wins will take the story in a direction suiting the Paragon/Renegade theme. If either choice's total wins exceed a 10-time lead on the other, then I will cease providing a choice and the rest of the story will take that theme.

The old version of the latter half of this chapter will be available at the end of this chapter in one huge dump, along with the old future chapters. You know, for those who were curious about what this fic used to look like.

Also, Merry Christmas.

\_ALERT THIS CHAPTER HAS NOT BEEN BETAED, IF YOU NOTICE ANY TYPOS OR ERRORS, PLEASE NOTIFY ME SO THAT I MAY CORRECT THEM.\_

Recommended Tracks to listen to while reading

Revival-DJ Skee and THX Remix

The Beauty of Cortana-Apocalyptica/Neil Davridge

During the Battle Sequence you should listen to:

Come on-Andy Hunter

**\*\*Fifty Shades of Overkill\*\***

**\*\*Chapter 3: Ragnarok\*\***

The Bridge of the \_Angelwing\_ blared with alarms as crewman sifted through a flood of new data.

"Give me a Sitrep, now!" Captain Heartnet shouted over the Neural net, immersing herself in the mental chatter. "Tell me what the thrice damned hells is going on!"

Cromwell's avatar sprang to life on the Bridge, his scowl evident. "157 vessels have exited the Relay!" He answered.

"Estimated 72 corvette-tonnage ships, 80 frigate-tonnage, four cruiser-tonnage, and a single flagship measuring 2 km in length!" A sensors operator reported frantically.

"It's huge!" One of the \_Angelwing's\_ helmsmen answered. "I don't think it's a diplomatic party!"

"None of the ship designs match the previous ships that came through." Heartnet thought.

"I've identified three distinct patterns among the new fleet." Cromwell said. "No similar patterns to those we encountered before. Estimating chances of this being first contact: 95% Non-intrusive scans read similar technologies to those from before." The ships followed one of three patterns: flat and utilitarian like the UNSC, a more organic, aquatic look that they not seen before, and the last were streamlined like water and tinted shades of blue; eerily reminiscent of the Covenant.

Even as Captain Heartnet listened to Cromwell's observations she was stricken by the curvier blue ships. "Those bluish ships remind me of the Covenantâ€"!" Unconsciously, she clutched the armrests of her command chair so hard her knuckles turned white.

On one of the UNSC Everest-class Dreadnoughts within the fleet, orders were being tossed around in response to the new arrivals. "This is Admiral Kastanie Drescher! All ships prime your weapons and prep firing solutions but hold fire! And where the hell are my High-Intensity scans! Someone get me details, and I want them yesterday!"

Within moments of the alien coalition fleets arrivals, every single Systems Alliance ship primed their weapons. From the smallest Kig-Yar



Corvette to the 28 kilometer CSO-Class Sangheili Super-Carriers, every Systems Alliance ship had their weapons armed and trained on the alien fleet. The newer heavier tonnage vessels began projecting great arcs of orange light, taking deep, intrusive scans of the enemy fleet; scanning everything from the superstructure of the vessels to the occupants within.

"Reading high energy signatures and gravitational distortions!" One of bridge crew cried out, "Concentrated near the bows of their ships! Ma'am, it's likely their weapons system! They have their weapons systems charged!"

The report was shared by all of the Systems Alliance vessels.

"Those bastards," the AI Leonidas cursed to himself before opening a fleet-wide channel, "This is UNSC AI Leonidas of the Dreadnought Kilimanjaro! All ships are armed, repeat they are armed! High Intensity scans confirm they are warships, I repeat, all unknown vessels are armed and warships! Weapons scanned as low-powered pulse lasers, gravitational-assisted railguns, and gravitational-distortion unguided rockets!"

"Reclaimers, this is Iridescent Vortex speaking. The Geth constructs provided weapon designations. Those are GARDIAN lasers, Mass Accelerators Cannons, and Disruptor Torpedoes."

"I could care less what those alien bastards call them! As far as I'm concerned this is a damned invasion fleet! This is Admiral Hackett, all ships, prepare to fire!"

"Belay that order! This is AI Athena of the Arcturus! All ships hold your fire but do not stand down! We are being hailed!"

**\*\*[\*\*\_\*\*Destiny Ascension\*\*\_\*\*, Bridge, Earlier]\*\***

"Goddess!" Throughout the gathered Council fleet, other cries of shock and fear were heard.

One of the weapons officers began hyperventilating at the sight of the ARMADA staring down the proverbial gun barrel pointed at the Citadel fleet.

Less than a second had passed since they entered the system beyond Relay 314, and already they were being targeted by ships that defied all laws of Mass Effect science. Their sheer mass violated what they thought as the limits of ship construction by several factors, many of them dwarfing a majority of the Council fleet. What was the most terrifying was the sheer number of vessels that were over the length of kilometer. By council standards the aliens possessed enough dreadnoughts to outnumber the Council's own by a ratio of four to one.

Red beams projected out from the larger vessels were sweeping through their ships, and straight through kinetic barriers. The high energy scanning beams disrupted systems they passed through. The VIs on all the ships were reporting system errors and that the beams were scanning their vessels. It was apparent that nothing was secret from this new alien race. The black void of space was nearly absent from the holographic viewscreen on the Bridge of the Destiny Ascension,

and was instead filled almost entirely by the veritable wall of ships they were facing. Bridge officers were reporting that none of the ships were below frigate-weight, the smallest being classified by Council design as a destroyer. Along with that there were split into a several distinct different design categories. The first were ships that looked blocky and geometric; a utilitarian scheme, similar to the Turians. Silvery armor coated them, and their bows sported the muzzles of very nasty looking spinal guns. The second group was a mixture of purple and silver-purple organic-looking ships, with obvious weapons emplacements coating the hulls, most similar to that of the Asari designs; somewhat pleasing to look at but displaying its strength for all to see at the same time. The third group was the smallest, and consisted of smaller, jagged vessels with obvious patchwork hulls but uniform design.

What caught everyone's attention however were the two very unique objects that slowly drifted in the massive system-spanning armada. A large, geometric silver and gold ship the size of the *Destiny Ascension* floated at the forefront, and was the main source of the red beams. At the center of the alien armada was a massive structure that was even larger than the Citadel. Several of the smaller of the alien ships were constantly coming and going from the station.

It frightened, no, it terrified Matriarch, commander of the *Destiny Ascension*. Never before had the Council encountered a fleet so massive in their thousands of years of history. Not during the Rachni war or the Krogan Rebellions. No species had ever come close to constructing such a massive station comparable to the Citadel; for a new species to have built something so gargantuan meant that they were likely on par with the Protheans. For such a fleet to be amassed, it made Ciana, an Asari Matriarch in charge of what was once thought as the most powerful warship in the known galaxy, feel very small. Over the communication channels captains were either frantically asking for orders, screaming incoherently, having mental breakdowns, or shouting in indignant rage.

"Energy levels from the alien vessels are spiking!" one of the crew shouted, "Alien vessels are reorienting! We're being targeted!"

Matriarch Ciana gripped the railing of the command platform in the CIC. The next few moments would decide the future, and she had to act swiftly and wisely. They had been scanned, alright. That's standard procedure for any civilization, and not necessarily a hostile act. So why were they about to open fire? It had only been a few seconds! The Citadel fleet had no Quarian or Batarian ships, so these new races surely recognized that they were dealing with a different faction. Was this new race inherently hostile? Were they put on edge by the previous attacks?

Then Ciana realized something. The entire Council fleet consisted of warships with fully armed and activated weaponry! Of course this new race interpreted the Citadel fleet as being an invasion force!

Going in combat-ready was standard first contact protocol after the Rachni wars: hope for the best, but prepare for war. Now, she could either stand and fight, or attempt diplomacy. Her decision would either save them all, or damn them to oblivion.

The path was clear.

"Open a channel to the alien command station." Ciana ordered, attracting shocked looks from the crewmembers.

"But-" the weapons officer objected.

"Do it!" Ciana shouted urgently.

"Hailing," the communications officer reported, muttering, "Please answer, please answer!"

"Power levels from alien vessels leveling out. They are still oriented toward us, but no other actions have occurred." the sensors officer stated, "\_Palaven's Harbinger\_ is requesting permission to open fire."

"Permission denied," Ciana shot back, "Tell Septimus that if anyone jumps the gun, they'll have to deal with the Ascension."

"General Septimus has acknowledged."

"We are receiving a signal from the alien command station!" the communications officer alerted Ciana, "Audio only."

"Put it through." Ciana nodded.

"Unknown vessels," a modulated voice spoke in perfect, if not outdated, Asari, "you are trespassing in Systems Alliance space. If you do not power down your weapons, we will be forced to open fire. You have one minute."

Momentary shock passed through the collective minds of the fleet as they realized this new alien civilization knew at least one of their languages. Matriarch Ciana gritted her teeth. They could try and retreat, but that didn't make this new species disappear. What if they decided to follow and carved a warpath through Council space? There were more ships here than were allotted to a single sector of Council space! They didn't outnumber the collective fleet of the Council, but they certainly were larger than them by sheer tonnage. The entire thing stank of overkill, and it showed that this new species was taking incursions into their territory very, very seriously.

"Comply with their request," Ciana said gravely, earning her some shocked looks.

"Admiral-"

"Just do it!" She snarled, "Either we follow what they say or we all die here and now and Goddess knows what happens after that! Any ship that attempts to take hostile action against these new comers is to be scuttled!"

The communications officer swallowed nervously, and opened a channel to the fleet, "All ships, stand down, I repeat, stand down!"

Indignant cries and protests echoed over the radio, to which Ciana opened a channel at her own station, "All of you, power down your weapons! Any ships that do not comply will be fired upon, either

personally by the \_Ascension\_ or the alien fleet."

Captains were cursing at nobody in particular, but they obeyed her orders. Throughout the fleet GARDIAN lasers powered down and Mass Accelerator guns shut off, dumping their wasted energy into the ceramic heat radiator strips along the hull.

"Admiral," General Desolas's voice crackled over the radio, "Are you sure this is wise?"

"It's all we can do for now," Ciana replied, "But be prepared to retreat if contact goes hard. The Council must survive."

"Why did they even come along anyways?" Desolas groaned, "It makes this whole situation even more complicated."

"No use complaining about things that are already done," General Septimus chastised him, "Let's just get this over with, and we can all go home. Hopefully."

"Transmit this message to the alien command ship," Ciana addressed her communications officer, "Run it through the translator and convert it to the older dialect they are using."

"Ready whenever you are, Admiral," the officer's fingers danced over the holographic console.

Ciana cleared her throat, "This is Matriarch Ciana T'Nari of Council Flagship \_Destiny\_ \_Ascension\_. We have come here to investigate reports of a newly discovered species— reports which your presence has just confirmed. We come with peaceful intentions, and hope that we can avoid a military confrontation."

There was a moment of silence as the message was transmitted. The response came several seconds later.

"If that is so, then why have you come with an attack group of warships? Your explanation had better be \_\*\*fucking\*\*\_ good." She furrowed her brow as the program failed to translate the word but it didn't matter.

Ciana was more shocked at the bluntness and audacity of the alien species. She was a bit indignant at being threatened, but she had to keep a cool head. If this went wrong the Council was looking at a seriously one-sided fight. But how did they consider the Council an attack force compared to their own fleet?!

"We were unsure of the situation on this side of the Relay," Ciana replied, "We have had our own share of less-than-ideal experiences with First Contacts, you should understand our caution when dealing with such situations."

"You walk into a public area with a loaded gun, expect to get shot," the voice replied arrogantly, "but we understand. We have similar protocols, as I'm sure you have gathered. What are your intentions? Will you leave, or do you want to engage in diplomatic relations?"

"If you mean meeting in person," Ciana answered, "then we would not be averse to such a thing."

"Excellent," the voice cheerily chirped, the change in attitude abrupt, "In two hours, send a diplomatic party to our Flagship, the Arcturus. It's the 56 kilometer long starship. You can't miss it."

When Ciana heard the translation her eyes grew wide at the concept of a starship that massive, and she began staring at what she had thought was a station. A gap was made in the fleet around the station—No, not a space station, but a starship. Dignity almost forgotten, only her centuries of experience kept her from collapsing to the floor. This new species was on par, no they were above the Protheans. Creating a station was one thing, but a vessel of that size, capable of both movement and FTL—the implications were anything but comforting.

As if to show off, the alien starship Arcturus did a physics-defying barrel roll. Engineers across the Council fleet stood frozen with their mouths wide open at the brazen display of technological prowess. The maneuver attested both the alien's mastery of gravity and the structural strength of their goliath of a starship.

"You can bring one ambassador per species," the voice continued, "as well as two guards per ambassador. Please refrain from bringing any heavy weaponry. Also, you'll have to rely on our translators, as our computer systems are non-compatible."

After a few seconds of silence, Ciana began to open a channel to the Council, when the voice came back.

"Oh, and one more thing. Take your Disruptor Torpedoes out of their firing tubes. We can see them, you know. It would be a shame if you started a war because some gunner got trigger-happy."

A chill ran down Ciana's spine. Just who were they dealing with here?

**\*\*[\*\*\_\*\*Arcturus\*\*\_, CIC]\*\***

The Arcturus Bridge was much too large to be considered as such. It was more of a Combat Information Center. About half the size of a football field, it spanned three decks of the ship. The constant noise of 200 people working constantly filled the large room(s). Despite the widespread of Neural Laces, many people still used verbal communication.

The commanding officer of the Arcturus, Rear Admiral Samuel Strider, sat at his command console, sighing. It had been a rather stressful day, and in all honesty, he just wanted some sleep. The 56 kilometer long Cortana-class Dreadnought Arcturus served as the mobile capital and command center of the Systems Alliance, much like FleetCom back on Earth. This meant that in addition to the Council breathing over his shoulder, he also had to deal with constant requisition orders, and just about all the paperwork and crap the military could dump on his desk. He barely got a moments rest, and when he did, it didn't last for more than a few hours. All that made for a very tired Human. His First Officer tapped him on the shoulder.

"Admiral , sir, are you alright?" the Sangheili's guttural voice carried a touch of concern. With the end of the war, Sangheili-Human relations were indeed strained but as of late those tensions had been rendered non-existent, so seeing the two different species serve on the same vessel was no surprise.

"I'm fine," Samuel groaned, "Just tired."

"If you're tired, sir, perhaps you should take a rest."

Samuel rubbed his eyes, "â€|Alright. Tork, you have the Bridge."

The Rear Admiral stumbled off, leaving his First Officer in charge of the \_Arcturus\_.

Sitting in the seat next to the command chair was the inactive Android body of Athena \_(technically a gynoid but nobody knows what that means)\_. Athena was the most advanced (and expensive) AI the Systems Alliance could afford, and her considerable processing power was only surpassed by Forerunner Ancilla. With the combined power of her and all the other AIs of the First and Second Fleet, the "Codex" given to them by the Geth had already been analyzed five times over, and integrated into all databases.

So speaking to the alien fleet had been trivial.

Based off what they knew, the attack group (a \_fleet\_ by Council standards; that had given the UNSC AIs a good laugh) had been sent by the Citadel Council, a galaxy-spanning government. However, due to the nature of their FTL travel, their territory looked like Swiss cheese. There were huge gaps between colonized areas, called "Relay Dead Zones". Already star charts had been relayed back to Terra, and automated scout ships sent to explore and assess the potential value of these dead zones.

Athena's eyes snapped open, and she glanced at Tork, "Just got off the line with those Citadel types. You know, I really like screwing with people."

Tork rolled his eyes, "Yes, construct. So I know."

Athena stood up and pretended to stretch, "Well, I'm going to help prepare to diplomats for the meeting. Try not to blow up the ship while I'm gone."

As she left the CIC, Tork muttered, "You are the ship, you can't be gone."

\*\*[2 hours later, Shanxi Space]\*\*

The majority of the Systems Alliance fleet had displaced and taken new positions closer to the planet, leaving the Cortana-class Dreadnought on its own to stare down the Council fleet.

Two small shuttles flew out of the \_Destiny\_ \_Ascension's\_ hangar bay and pushed themselves towards the \_Arcturus\_. Within, the diplomatic party and their protectors readied themselves for a more personal first-contact.

"I don't like flying into this blind," Saren Arterius, Spectre

(currently acting bodyguard), grumbled, looking his rifle over.

"I have to agree," the Turian diplomat, Salius, nodded, "We don't even know what they look like, let alone if we can breathe their atmosphere."

"Well, they have the leverage. We have to comply with their requests," the Salarian diplomat, Turmok, stated, "Perhaps later we can dictate the terms, but for now, we must go along."

"When can we ever dictate terms with that?" the Asari diplomat, Sarysia, gestured out the window at the alien fleet as it grew closer and closer.

The entire diplomatic team and their bodyguards sat in silence for the rest of the flight.

**\*\*[Theta System]\*\***

Dropping out of FTL, ship after ship popped into being. Soon, the Theta system was flooded with thousands of ships, all looking for their lost comrades. The Quarian Migrant fleet had arrived.

**\*\*[\*\*\_\*\*Arcturus\*\*\_\*\*, Main Hangar Bay 1]\*\***

The Main Hangar of the Arcturus was easily a single kilometer long in length and width, but a hundred meters shorter in height. Several Paris-class MK.2 Frigates dominated the majority of the hangar, taking up almost half the hangar. Above them, angular Katana-class Fighters were suspended, ready for rapid deployment at a moment's notice. D79H-TC Pelicans took up the majority of the remaining space. A landing pad had been designated for the alien diplomats, flanked by two rows of Marines serving as an honor guard. Admiral Kastanie Drescher, Fleetmaster Selt Nar'Tarkam, Shipmistress Chur'R-Tak (Kig-Yar), Unggoy Minister Dadak, Mgalekgolo Diplomat Soosha, and the AI Athena stood and awaited the arrival of the shuttle. Well, everyone was standing, but Athena was leaning against a parked Scorpion-Series Main Battle Tank, or MBT, Mk.2.

"Athena," Kastanie frowned at the AI's mobile platform, "Show some respect to our guests."

Athena laughed, "Our guests are still a few thousand kilometers away, I'll know when they get here, and when they do, I'll stand."

Selt gave Athena the Sangheili equivalent of a scowl, "You do not need rest, construct."

Athena pouted at the hulking saurian, "You're no fun."

The diplomatic party waited for the next minute in silence. Athena finally stood up, moments before the two shuttle craft from the aliens entered the hangar. They were curved and oblong, with no clear cockpit. They shone with an iridescent cerulean sheen. Four pivoting thrusters on the sides of the shuttles provided a clear means of thrust, landing the two vehicles as lightly as a feather.

"Those thrusters were too small to lift a ship that size," Athena mused, "I wonder if it's being supplemented."

"Probably," Dadak quipped, "Maybe it has an antigravity drive."

"Perhaps both technologies are too weak to work alone, so they support each other." Chur'R-Tak added her two cents.

"If so, when either one gives out, that turns the whole thing into one giant flying coffin," Kastanie muttered.

Both shuttles powered down, and the doors opened with a puff of air, slowly rising. The anxiety and excitement was palpable.

The first group to exit the shuttle consisted of six minimally armed personnel, obviously bodyguards. They all had tinted helmets on, so it was hard to tell what they looked like underneath. Two had thin waists and broad chests, with three fingers and digitgrade legs. The other two were slender, lanky, and also possessed digitgrade legs. The last pair was a shock, mostly to the Marine honor guard. The two alien's bodies looked completely Human! They appeared to be woman, and more than one soldier entertained thoughts about undressed them.

After the bodyguards gave the all clear signal, the diplomats exited the shuttle.

\*\*[Gave the audience a perspective switch. Audiences love perspective switches.]\*\*

"It's safe," Saren spoke over the radio, "You can exit the shuttle now."

Sarysia was the first to step out, taking in her environment with a trained eye. They had landed in an expansive hangar, the likes of which she had never seen before outside of the Citadel. Large Cruiser sized ships dominated the space, their bulky, angular, geometric, and gray hulls a stark contrast to the silvery sheen of the hangar. In fact, she didn't remember seeing any of those ships flying around outside. Huh.

Sarysia stared in shock as the majority of the aliens. They looked almost like Asari! With the exception of a fur on their heads and skin color, some of them could pass as Asari. It appeared that the species had two genders, which was quite interesting. If their ships were anything to go by, their intelligence must match the Asari as well.

Turmok's thoughts were moving at the speed of light as he observed every little detail he could. \_Bipedal alien species, similar to the Asari. Bigendered. Weapons appear to be kinetic energy weapons, presence of clips indicate low-ammo capacity. Secondary clip possible power source? Possible coilgun design. Armor is streamlined, minimal protection perhaps? Possibility of personal shielding indicated, armor is possibly powered? Presence of other vehicles in hangar. Largest is Cruiser-weight vessels. New design. Outdated? Or perhaps reserve trump card. Armed shuttles also present, appear to be more for atmospheric flight, probably not FTL-capable. Obvious Fighter craft also visible suspended from ceiling. Alien diplomats of different species. Most are Asari-like species, but presence of other species indicative of collective governmentâ€| situation just got



more complicated.\_

Salius stared nervously at large Cruiser-weight vessels taking up most of the space in the hangar. This ship was already bigger than the Citadel, why did they need more firepower? It implied a rather disturbing possibility. Weapons technology almost always advances as needed. Council ships never exceeded Dreadnought size because nobody built any bigger than that. Their galaxy adhered to a standard, and only improved when someone else upped the ante. If this new group of aliens built their ships this big and this powerful, he shuddered to think of who they fought, or might be fighting.

The Hanar, Elcor, Volus, and Drell representatives stepped out of the second shuttle and gazed in awe at everything. Well, the Drell was in awe. It was hard to tell with the Elcor, Volus, and Hanar. The Elcor always looked emotionless, the Volus was wearing an environment suit and the Hanar didn't have a face. They closely followed the main Council diplomats.

As Sarysia, Turmok, and Salius neared the alien representatives, they took in their appearance. The first was one of those Asari-like creatures, with tan skin, long brown head-fur, and a navy-blue decorated military uniform. The second was a strange, saurian creature with four jaws, and covered in silvery armor. Salius thought it looked like a bastardized child of a Krogan and Turian. Turmok recognized the creature as a predator, and was immediately on guard. Sarysia took note of the small, bird-like creature dressed in loose-fitting robes, and a creature that reminded her of the Volus in stature. The second to last being was the oddest, a bipedal suit of armor filled with worms. The last representative unnerved the Council diplomats. It appeared to be another of those Asari-like beings, but there was something unnaturally fluid about its movements. The only clothes it wore was a strange white bodysuit with various metal pieces attached to random areas. There was nothing to denote rank at all.

"Greetings," the first Asari-like creature smiled, speaking perfect (if not outdated) Asari, "I am Admiral Kastanie Drescher of the UNSC.

She gestured to the saurian creature, "This is Fleetmaster Selt Nar'Tarkam of the Sangheili Empire." Selt nodded respectfully.

"Shipmistress Chur'R-Tak of the Kig-Yar Confederacy." The Shipmistress squawked out what was probably a greeting.

"Unngoy Minister Dadak," the diminutive creature smiled under his mask.

"Mgalekgolo Diplomat Soosha," the imposing creature rumbled.

The last being spoke up, interrupting Kastanie, "and last but not least, I am the Arcturus's shipboard AI, Athena. Nice to meet you!"

\*\*[Insert Blasto the Hanar Spectre commercial here]\*\*

"AI!" Saren shouted, triggering every single Council bodyguard into action. Their hands snapped to their rifles, whipping them out and

deploying the compact weapons.

Within an instant, both parties had taken aim at the other. The alien soldiers had leveled their projectile weapons at the bodyguards, while the alien representatives had drawn weapons from almost nowhere. The Admiral Kastanie had a blade made of golden light formed around her right arm, while Selt had ignited a cobalt double-pronged blade of plasma. Chur'R-Tak had drawn a small pistol, and Dadak had drawn a double-pronged glowing green-purple weapon. Soosha had entered a defensive stance, of the \_Arcturus's\_ party Athena was the only one who had not armed herself. She frowned disapprovingly, like a mother that had just seen her child steal a cookie or something. "Really, you're going to be pointing guns?" Athena scoffed, "Please, you're outnumbered. If you want to start a shooting war, go ahead, but your fleet will be decimated in seconds. Even if you kill this body, can you kill the whole ship?"

Almost on cue, the automated defenses of the hangar came to life. Auto-Turrets sprang from the walls, and ceiling, the mounted weapons of the nearby frigates activated, bringing their 20mm autocannons to bear, and several unpiloted HRUNTING/YGGDRASIL Mark IX Armor Defense System 'Mantis' mechs stomped into view, their cannons and missile pods aiming directly at the Council party. The Council Diplomatic party had enough ordinance aimed at them to vaporize a small army. Under his helmet, Saren was beginning to sweat.

"Now," Athena crossed her arms and tapped her foot impatiently, "are we going to be able to talk civilly," for theatrics, she activated the laser sights on the weapons that had them, bathing the Council species in a cluster of red and green light. "or am I going to have to start shooting?"

After a tense silence, Sarysia placed a hand on the barrel of Saren's gun and pushed it down. "Lower your weapons," She ordered. Saren gaped at her.

Forcing his weapon out of her grip he again took aim at Athena. "Ambassador, I can't allow-" Saren began, but was cut off with a glare.

"Lower your weapons now, Spectre." The Asari snarled, her body briefly glowing in a biotic aura, "Do you want to get us all killed?" Though her biotics dissipated from around her body, it was still concentrated in her hands.

"I operate with the Council's authority," Saren spat, "I don't answer to you!"

The other bodyguards, who still possessed a sense of self preservation, slowly lowered their weapons, much to Saren's chagrin. Athena smiled.

"Well then," the AI said in a cheerful tone, "Guess that's one body for the morgue, then." The amassed weaponry adjusted their aim to point at the lone Turian.

With a scowl, Saren lowered his gun, snapping it back into compact mode.

"Good boy," Athena snapped her fingers, and the hangar's defense

systems slipped back behind hidden panels. The Cruiser's tertiary weapons cycled down as well, and the Mechs stomped away. The Marines stood at attention once more.

"Would you care to explain that?" Admiral Kastanie asked, tense from the recent situation.

"AIs are dangerous!" Turmok exclaimed, "They'll destroy your whole civilization if you don't eradicate them first! You are in imminent danger!"

"Indeed," Salius added, "In all instances, AIs have proven to be uncontrollable, and killed their handlers."

Kastanie and the other representatives cast quizzical glances at each other. Dadak looked at Athena, who shrugged.

"I guess that means we are the outlier then," Kastanie finally said.

"Please, trust us on this matter," Sarysia pleaded, "We have seen it happen repeatedly on numerous occasions. We know very well how AIs view organics."

Athena rolled her eyes, muttering sarcastically, "Oh no, help, a racist."

Kastanie glared at her for a second, before sternly addressing Sarysia, "Ambassador, I assure you, we have been using AIs for upwards of two centuries. They are our comrades-in-arms. If it bothers you so much, you can just get back on your shuttle and fly away."

Athena made a little swooshing noise and mimed a shuttle flying away with her hands.

Selt deactivated his sword, and clipped it onto his thigh, "I do not believe we learned your names, ambassadors."

The Diplomats respectively identified themselves.

"I am Sarysia of the Asari Republic."

"I am Turmok of the Turian Hierarchy."

"I am Salius of the Salarian Union."

Sarysia gestured to the others behind her, "These are the Diplomats from the client races of the Citadel Council. They will not take part in the negotiations."

Admiral Kastanie nodded, "I see. Perhaps Athena could give them a tour of the Arcturus while we take the negotiations into a more secure area."

"That makes sense," Salius replied, "I hope this results in peaceful relations between our two peoples, Admiral."

Kastanie smile good-naturedly, if a little guarded, "As do I, ambassador."

The group made their way into the ship, as Athena greeted the other Ambassadors, who were left with a single Asari Commando to guard them.

"Hello, ladies, gentlemen, and those of non-categorized genders! Welcome to the Cortana-class Dreadnought Arcturus!" Athena cheerfully announced, "I am Athena, the shipboard AI, and I will be your guide for today!"

**\*\*[Theta System, Turian Frigate]\*\***

"I'm sorry, sir, I cannot allow you to-"

"Keelah, if your ship does not move, then you will become a smear on our hull! Do you hear me?! We are on a rescue mission!"

The Turian crewman shut off the audio feed, rubbing his ears. What a time for those suit rats to show up! The Council was busy with classified business of galactic importance; they had no time for vagrants!

"What do they want?" the disinterested captain asked with little conviction.

"They're threatening to ram us if we don't move."

"They wouldn't dare."

Suddenly the navigator's station lit up, and the Turian manning it shouted, "Sir, they're accelerating on a collision course!"

The Captain sat straight up, yelling in a panic, "Evasive maneuvers!"

The small Frigate dove out of the way of the Quarian Migrant fleet as they plowed through; an unstoppable force of metal and Mass Effect fields.

The Turian Frigate shot off into FTL to summon help as the Migrant fleet moved into proximity with the Relay, the military elements forming up into groups, readying for FTL.

**\*\*[Observation Lounge, Arcturus]\*\***

The Council diplomats and the Systems Alliance representatives sat around a circular table overlooking the panoramic windows of the Arcturus's observation lounge. Through it, the massed First and Second fleets of the Systems Alliance could be seen orbiting Shanxi.

"Admiral, your government is quite impressive; I daresay we haven't encountered anything like it before."

Admiral Kastanie Drescher smiled at the compliment from Sarysia, "Thank you, Ambassador. We have not encountered another galactic government either."

"I have to wonder," Turmok began, staring Kastanie down, "Are you truly extragalactic, or is this just some trick, designed to

intimidate us?

"Are you saying we fabricated the historical data we just gave you?" Dadak scoffed, "Please, we didn't have enough time to even make such an elaborate ruse, and even if we did, there would be no point."

"This is our galaxy," Salius said with some concern, "You clearly have the technological advantage, how do we know you won't encroach on our territory?"

"Oh, you can be assured," Selt smirked, "that any area we colonize will not be within your ability to police."

Sarysia frowned. There was something wrong with that wording.

"What exactly do you mean?" she asked warily.

Kastanie smirked, "Well, our area of this galaxy only has Relays in remote areas, and the ones that are located near our major population centers have been disabled. In effect, with your manner of FTL, you cannot reach our planets, save Shanxi."

"I still am having a hard time accepting that your technology isn't based off of Eezo," Salius commented, "Every species in this galaxy uses Mass Effect technology."

Kastanie shrugged, "Different galaxy, different technology."

"You said that your Mass Relays were disabled," Turmok crossed his arms, "How were you able to disable a Mass Relay?"

"We didn't, it was like that when we got here," a holographic representation of Athena sprang to life in the middle of the conference table, startling most of the delegates. Unlike her robotic avatar, which only wore a tight bodysuit, her holographic avatar was dressed in an elegant robe of Greek design.

"Why is your AI here?" Turmok snarled, "I thought it was giving the other representatives a tour of your ship."

"I'm really good at multitasking," Athena smirked, "and you might want to lay off the racism. Otherwise my followers will social justice your ass."

Turmok wore a face of confusion, "Social justice?"

"Check it out," Athena snapped her holographic fingers, "You've got quite an extensive extranet there, shame if something happened to it."

Instantly, holographic screens leapt into being, displaying various Extranet sites.

"How is our computer technology compatible?" Sarysia inquired, "I was not aware they could interface. You said they couldn't"

"They can't," Athena answered bluntly, "I had to work it out myself, using a lot of processing power, and the information the Geth gave me."

"The Geth?!" Turmok shouted in outrage, slamming his hands down on the table, "You have been communicating with the Geth?!"

"You hacked their computers?!" Kastanie shouted at Athena, "Who gave you clearance?!"

Athena looked at Turmok, "Yes," then to Kastanie, "The Council."

"The Geth are dangerous," Sarysia attempted to get a word in, "Please, the threat of the Geth is too much to be ignored! You cannot continue relations with them!"

"I have to agree," Salius spoke up, "What if they convince your synthetics to rebel against you? If that happens, you are on your own."

Athena mouthed "Blah, blah, blah, blah."

Selt pounded his fist on the table, "Clearly," he snarled, "you are not ready to engage in diplomatic proceedings with us. You should return to your territory, and come back when you are ready to talk civilly."

Turmok looked fit to burst, but Sarysia put a hand on his shoulder, "He's right, we should go for now."

"Sorry for wasting your time," Salius sounded strained, "I hope your own hubris does not destroy you."

Elsewhere in the ship, a group of odd aliens were being led around the ship by an android.

"And this is one of our Singularity reactors!" Athena announced to the group as they gazed at the enormous transparent cylinder. Numerous apertures inside the cylinder faced a spherical void. Light around it appeared to warp. The entire setup rumbled with power.

"This one wonders how this reactor works," the Hanar delegate mused.

"I can't tell you too much," Athena admitted, "but it is powered by a black hole."

"That sounds dangerous," the Volus wheezed, "how do you prevent entire ship from collapsing in on itself?"

"Classified," Athena shrugged, "but it would take hours to explain anyways."

"Inquisitively, how long has your kind been traveling the stars?" the Elcor delegate spoke in a monotone.

"Well," Athena cupped her chin in her hand, pretending to think, "Upwards of two centuries at least. I can't tell you the exact number at this point, but we're not new to this."

The delegate's omni-tools beeped, a single line of text displaying on

the holographic screen.

"Apologetic: It appears that we must leave."

"Ah, no problem," Athena cheerily smiled, "I hope you get to visit again soon."

As the delegates left the reactor room, she sifted through the scans she had gained of the delegates. Interesting, especially that jellyfish thing.

\*\*[Council Shuttle, en route to \*\*\_\*\*Destiny Ascension\*\*\_]\*\*

The Diplomatic party sat in silence, their body language tense.

"You know," Saren broke the quiet, "The Council is going to want a report. What are you going to tell them?"

"I'm not sure," Sarysia admitted, wringing her hands.

Salius looked out the window at the Alliance fleet as they slowly moved away from it, muttering, "We're going to need bigger ships."

\*\*[\*\*\_\*\*Destiny Ascension\*\*\_]\*\*, Conference Room, later]\*\*

"Hmph, no Eezo whatsoever," Councilor Sparatus scoffed, reading over the sensor reports on his Omni-tool, "Surely they cannot be that advanced. Perhaps their ships are big because they need to compensate for a lower standard of technology?"

"Don't be foolish," Valern rebuked the Turian Councilor, "We know they have shields equal to or stronger than our kinetic barriers, along with enough firepower to wipe out a small attack group. This system doesn't have enough resources to support the fleet they have amassed, so surely they have other systems. Since they do not have Eezo, they cannot achieve standard Mass Effect FTL, but they could not have gathered such a force on sublight speeds alone. It stands to reason that they have an alternate form of FTL."

"Every civilization in this galaxy uses Eezo," Sparatus scowled, "I find it hard to believe that this race uses different technology."

"I don't," Tevos cut in, "When we build ships, we have to take into account that we must generate a Mass Effect field big enough to accommodate the ship. The Destiny Ascension is already pushing the envelope in terms of efficiency. If we built any bigger, it would likely eat up more resources than it is worth."

With a few taps of her Omnitool, she activated a holographic projector near the wall, displaying the \_Destiny Ascension\_ next to the massive \_Arcturus\_.

"Without Eezo," Tevos continued, "their ship sizes would not be limited by Mass Effect fields."

"What about shearing force?" Sparatus countered, "That ship should be tearing itself to pieces without Mass Effect fields. Especially with that roll it pulled earlier."

"Perhaps I have the answer to that," Valern spoke up, "Before the Salarian Union discovered Eezo, we were researching a concept called 'inertial dampening'."

"Explain," Sparatus demanded of the Salarian Councilor.

"Well," Valern continued, "As you all know, when a ship has reached a sufficient mass, any sort of maneuver puts stress on the hull. If it is big enough, or has structural weak points, then the vessel is in danger of compromising hull integrity. We were trying to develop some sort of inertial dampener to lower the stress that would be imparted on the ship's hull. This would raise the 'ceiling' on ship size, but once we discovered Eezo, it became a moot point. With a lower ship mass, the danger of shearing is almost nonexistent."

"Don't we use inertial dampeners?" Tevos asked, a bit confused, "I'm sure I heard some of the technicians talking about maintenance on them earlier."

"You heard correctly," Valern nodded, "Modern-day inertial dampeners are simply specialized Mass Effect field generators."

"So then how was this new species able to make inertial dampeners without Eezo?" Sparatus challenged Valern.

The Salarian Councilor sighed, "Before we discovered Eezo, we had several theories on how to create inertial dampeners, but the discovery of Eezo ended that line of research."

Valern looked at the hologram of the Arcturus, "I can only assume that they developed an inertial dampener independent of Eezo."

"Well, now that that's set aside, what about the other things the Diplomatic team informed us of?" Tevos scrolled through the report.

"Hmph," Sparatus snorted, "These people have no respect for Council law. Spirits, they even use AI!"

"They can't respect Council law if they don't know it," Valern countered, "and they claimed to have been using AIs for upwards of two centuries, if not more. I would like to give them the benefit of the doubt, but we have too much bad history with AI to just ignore those important life lessons."

"Another thing," Sparatus was almost shouting now, "They use black holes to power their ships! They must be crazy!"

"We weaponize singularities," Tevos pointed out, "How is this any different?"

"There is a huge difference between a singularity and a black hole, Tevos," Sparatus growled, "What happens when one of their ships is destroyed in combat?! They take the whole system with them! We can't even afford to damage one of their ships or we will all be destroyed!"

"You are overreacting," Valern shot, "From what the delegates



described, the black hole is probably sustained by some sort of mechanism. Loss of reactor containment probably would also cause the black hole to dissipate after a few seconds."

"Well," Sparatus sat down, crossing his arms, "That isn't too bad. What do we do about them, though? They're a government similar to us, I doubt they'd react favorably to us asking them to join us."

"Then don't ask them," Valern grinned, "Force them."

"How do you expect to do that?" Tevos asked with a little bit of anxiety.

"Give STG some time," Valern rubbed his hands together, "Where our technological superiority fails us, our cunning will make up for it. I guarantee that within a few years we will be able to force this 'Systems Alliance' to join us."

"Huh," Sparatus looked at Valern inquisitively, "I'll admit, I judged you wrong. I thought you were against us confronting these aliens."

"I am not against confronting them," Valern chuckled, "Just not directly. We wouldn't last in a straight up fight; that much is clear."

Suddenly the alarms in the ship sprung to life, startling the Council.

"Councilors," the voice of Matriach Ciana came over the comm, "We have a problem."

"What is it?" Tevos asked.

"The Geth!"

At the edges of the system, ships began appearing by the dozens as they dropped out of Eezo-based FTL, two Geth Dreadnoughts, 50 Geth Cruisers, and 200 Geth Frigates snapped into being without warning, floating thousands of kilometers away from the Alliance and Council Fleet. Detecting the Council ships, the Geth fleet sent a query to the Alliance command ship. The AI Athena responded frankly.

"They're here to conduct negotiations. I understand that your people and the Council aren't on good terms. Oh, look, they're powering up their weapons, how cute. Tell you what, whoever is left after this gets to negotiate, alright?"

Consensus was reached in nanoseconds. The Geth fleet powered up their weapons, and moved into a defensive formation. They would not fire the first shot, but they would come out on top.

\*\*[\*\*\_\*\*Destiny Ascension\*\*\_\*\*, Bridge]\*\*

"What do you mean you won't help us?!" Ciana shouted at the holographic image of the \_Arcturus's\_ AI.

"Sorry," Athena faked an apologetic tone, "You're both enemies, right? So this is kind of your thing. We don't want to get involved. You kids have fun!"

The connection was cut unceremoniously, causing Matriarch Ciana to pound her fist on the railing in frustration.

"Damn it! Fine, power up the main bow guns! We will blast those AI into debris!"

The Council fleet moved into formation, the Frigates taking point. Meanwhile the Alliance moved into a protective formation around Shanxi, raising shields and assuming a defensive posture.

"Several vessels exiting the Relay!" one of the sensors officers reported, "It's a Quarian Battle Group! Ten Cruisers and twenty Frigates of mixed design!"

"What do those vagrants want?" Ciana groaned. As if she didn't have enough shit to deal with.

"They're sending a fleet-wide transmission!" the same officer spoke.

"Put it through!" Ciana shouted.

"This is Migrant Fleet Battle Group One. We demand the immediate return of the crew of our Cruiser \_Tayyo\_."

Ciana massaged her forehead, "I'm too old for this."

\*\*[\*\*\_\*\*Arcturus\*\*\_\*\*, Main Computer Core]\*\*

"Oh dear," Athena frowned, "Quarians. That would just make the fight unfair. I'll send their survivor back in an escape pod, but they have to sit tight."

\*\*[Shanxi System]\*\*

The Quarian Battle Group suddenly lost all power to weapons and engines, drifting loosely in a slowly decaying formation. It didn't matter whether the ship was an old Asari, Salarian, Turian, or Quarian design. They all lost power.

\*\*[\*\*\_\*\*Qwib-Qwib\*\*\_\*\*, Bridge]\*\*

"What just happened?!" Admiral Zaal'Koris shouted at his command crew, who helplessly tried to manipulate dead consoles.

"Our cyber defenses were completely overcome within milliseconds!" One of the crew replied in a panic, "Not even the Geth are that good!"

Admiral Korris stared helplessly as the Geth accelerated, but not towards them. The Geth fleet cautiously approached the Council fleet, as the Council fleet sped towards the Geth.

"Those poor bastards," Korris muttered.

\*\*[\*\*\_\*\*Destiny Ascension\*\*\_\*\*, Bridge]\*\*

"Geth fleet is holding defensive position." The sensors operator

reported. Ciana huffed.

"Damn machines. Goddess help me, I hate them. Open fire and concentrate fire on the lead Dreadnought."

\*\*[Shanxi System]\*\*

The Geth built their ships with efficiency in mind. They had not changed from the insectoid appearance (because they were too unimaginative to think of another design), and every ship, be it Cruiser, Frigate, Dreadnought, or Fighter, they all had the same profile, albeit different size.

Unbound by Council law, their Dreadnoughts bridged the gap between size and efficiency. At 1.5 km, they were large enough to outsize any Council Dreadnought, and small enough to efficiently operate. However, compared to the \_Destiny Ascension's\_ 2 kilometer length and 4 kilometer height, they were dwarfed in size and weaponry. The four bow guns of the Asari Dreadnought fired in a staggered pattern, sending Mass Effect-propelled slugs sailing forth, each at least three times more powerful than a small nuclear device.

The slugs rammed into the Geth Dreadnought's kinetic barriers, which swatted them away like flies. The Geth inside quickly adjusted the power distribution to the shield grid for maximum efficiency. As more bow cannon shots from the Council fleet hit nearby Frigates, the Geth fleet aimed their own cannons. A few Frigates exploded in magnificent fireballs before they were ready.

The Geth added their own fire to the crossfire, smashing apart a Turian Frigate and an Asari Cruiser in the first volley. The first Geth Dreadnought was speared by a shot from the \_Destiny Ascension\_, causing secondary explosions in the surrounding areas. It quickly compensated and continued firing.

The long-range artillery duel was measured in the thousands of kilometers, and they were both arguably far out of each other's effective weapons range, but due to the limitations of organic reaction times, any Council ship Cruiser or larger was hit with expert marksmanship, while the Council struggled to hit anything other than the Dreadnoughts.

The first Geth Dreadnought was pouring debris and other liquids from various hull breaches, as it was hit again and again by multiple shots from the \_Destiny Ascension\_. Kinetic barrier emitters all across the hull failed to restart as they were smashed to pieces by direct hits. The Dreadnought did not have long for this world. Consensus was reached, and the Dreadnought and all the Frigates leaped to FTL. Instantly, they reappeared inside the Council's formation. The Frigates streaked in and out of the Council ships, dogfighting with other Frigates while strafing the larger Cruisers. The Dreadnought's secondary guns blazed to life, smashing Frigates and mauling Cruisers. Turian fighters trailed the Frigates, only to be swatted out of the air by GARDIAN lasers. Within minutes, the 56 of the Council's 72 Frigates were blasted into oblivion by the Geth's 200 Frigates, 34 of which were disabled or destroyed.

The Dreadnought continued to lay down withering fire as it maneuvered to stay out of the \_Destiny Ascension's\_ firing arcs. Secondary explosions were rocking the massive ship as it struggled to keep

together. It fired its main gun once, turning a spotless Asari Cruiser into an expanding sphere of debris. All the while, the other Geth Dreadnought and Cruiser continued to lay down fire from afar, hitting their targets with unnerving accuracy.

\*\*[\*\*\_\*\*Palaven's Harbinger\*\*\_\*\*, Bridge]\*\*

"I have had it with these machines!" Septimus slammed his fist against the railing around his command pedestal, "Bring us about to fire at Geth Dreadnought One! Overclock the maneuvering thrusters if you must!"

\*\*[Shanxi System]\*\*

\_Palaven's Harbinger\_ turned hard, presenting its powerful bow gun to the Geth Dreadnought in their midst. It tried to move, but was too badly damaged. The bow gun fired once, the mass effect-propelled slug trailing residual cobalt energies. The round smashed straight through the unshielded hull and out the other side, taking the Drive Core with it.

Instantly, the Dreadnought exploded in a spectacular fashion, chunks of the hull flying in all directions, smashing Fighters and heavily damaging Cruisers. A few pieces bounced off of the \_Destiny Ascension's\_ kinetic barriers.

\*\*[\*\*\_\*\*Predator\*\*\_\*\*, Bridge]\*\*

"I can't believe this!" Desolas Arterius snarled as he viewed the reports streaming in from the surviving ships. Out of 72 Frigates, 80 Cruisers, four Dreadnoughts, and the \_Destiny Ascension\_, they had lost 60 Frigates, 35 Cruisers, and one Asari Dreadnought was heavily damaged.

"Admiral!" one of his communications officers shouted, "The \_Arcturus\_ is broadcasting on an open channel!"

"Put it onscreen!" He barked back as he turned to the holographic display.

"Inhabitants of this galaxy!" that Spirits-damned Alliance AI Athena announced from the \_Arcturus's\_ Bridge, a condescending sneer on her face, "While you squabble over trivial conflicts in the mud, we have gleaned all the data from your extranet and all computers connected to it. We have analyzed it allâ€¦. Let me tell you something. The races of the Alliance crawled out of the dirt with nothing but the skin on their backs. Every step forward we took was fueled by our own ingenuity and passion! No race is more representative of this than Humanity. We discovered FTL travel on our own! Every weapon we crafted came from nothing but the sweat on our backs and the ideas in our minds. We joined others among the stars atop the accomplishments of our ancestors. Unlike many others, we were not handed our technology on a silver platter! The ability to travel among the stars, the privilege of owning a galactic empireâ€¦ This is something that is earned, not given to you! Asari, Turian, Salarian, all of you were given technology far beyond what you deserved! You scavenged the scraps of a dead empire and rose to power with the fossils of their achievements! You were granted fiefdoms, and thought yourselves kings! Well, you are only the kings of thieves! Noâ€¦ you are no kings. You are tyrants! You subjugate others; fool yourselves into

thinking that you are fair; that you are just! Let me tell you, you are not! The Alliance Council has spoken! As of this moment, The Galactic Council's power and territory are forfeit! You are charged with tyranny, corruption, and genocide! The verdict; you are all guilty! The fleets and armies of the Turian Hierarchy, the Asari Republics, and the Salarian Union are ordered to immediately stand down, disarm, and submit to the authority of the Alliance! Your government shall be dismantled, your assets seized! We have analyzed your military capabilities, and have determined that you pose no threat to our forces. If you resist, you shall be annihilated. You are the weak, and we are the strong. The children of the Mantle behold you," at this, Athena appeared to point at the screen, "and we find youâ€¦ wanting."

"Admiral!" the conn officer shouted in distress, "We are being targeted by Alliance warships!"

Desolas sneered, "So the alien barbarians show their true colors at last. Target the \_Arcturus\_! We'll show these scum just how sharp our teeth are."

**\*\*[\*\*\_\*\*Destiny Ascension\*\*\_\*\*, Bridge]\*\***

The Bridge of \_Destiny Ascension\_ was in utter chaos. Reports were streaming in from every vessel, and each said the same thing. The Alliance ships were targeting them, and moving into attack formation. Athena, speaking on behalf of the Alliance Council, had suddenly and inexplicable declared a war of subjugation against the Galactic Council. Even as friendly indicators vanished off the tactical map, courtesy of the active Geth combatants, the Council ships had to choose between focusing on the immediate threat of the Geth, or the oncoming threat of the Alliance.

Nothing made sense to Ciana! True, the Alliance were a bit callous, even arrogant, but to declare open war on the Council? What was the purpose in that? They hadn't done anything to warrant this kind of treatment! She knew that the fleet stood no chance against the advanced warships of the Alliance, so there was only one option. She opened a channel to all the surviving ships.

"All ships, this is Matriarch Ciana! I am ordering a general retreat! All ships are to use the Relay to transit back to the Theta system immediately! We shall regroup with reinforcements there!"

Almost immediately, the Council contacted her. Sparatus's flanged voice berated her loudly, "Matriarch, what is the meaning of this! You must stand and fight!"

"With all due respect, Councilor," Ciana shouted back angrily, "I'm not getting everyone in this fleet killed just because you underestimate our enemy!"

"You do this, and you will never command a ship in Council space ever again!" Sparatus yelled at the top of his lungs, "Do you understand?!"

"Oh, I understand perfectly," Ciana gripped her chair's armrest as the \_Destiny Ascension\_ shook from a direct hit fired by a Geth Dreadnought, "Frankly, I don't give a fuck!" She promptly cut the connection.

Why was the Alliance attacking? Why were the Geth disregarding them? Were the Geth still allied with the Alliance? These questions could wait until she and her fleet were out of immediate danger.

The entire Council fleet was turning tail and running, barely covering their retreat. It was a full rout. Not one Council ship fired on any alliance vessel, and even the Geth were breaking off their attack. The Council fleet posed no threat.

Then, suddenly, without warning, the Alliance fleet opened fire.

The void, dark and all-consuming, was lit up for a brief moment as MAC rounds, Hard Light projectiles, Plasma Torpedoes, Missiles, Nukes, Slipspace Torpedoes, Capital-class Needler shards, HE shells, Archer missiles, Howler missiles, and particle beams streaked across space. The amassed hail of fire slammed into the Council fleet. Ships buckled and vanished; simply ceasing to exist under the wave of light and death. Frigates and Cruisers shattered under the barrage; their kinetic barriers ineffective against the sheer firepower of the UNSC, Sangheili, and Kig-Yar warships. Their hulls and superstructures were rendered into scrap metal as they shattered and broke under the impacts of MAC rounds. Hard-Light Rounds drilled through the hulls, and continued through into empty space, dissipating thousands of kilometers away from the battle. The hull around the entry and exit points of the Hard-Light shots began to fall apart in a shower of scattering orange flakes. Those struck by Plasma torpedoes and Howler missiles were consumed in massive fireballs. Numerous vessels were vivisected by Energy Projectors, their shields and armor ineffective against the powerful particle beams. Some ships, when struck by a Capital-grade needler round, were simply speared by the several-meter long projectile, leaving a gaping hole. Others weren't so fortunate, as the shards stuck fast, detonating with tremendous force shortly thereafter. The wounded Asari Dreadnought was mission killed, as one of its "arms" was struck by a MAC round, severing it from the main hull. It began to drift, losing power as its reactor shut down. Athena deemed the ship as no longer a threat, and diverted firepower away from the disabled vessel. Palaven's Harbinger lost its starboard 'wing', as Hardlight rounds struck the armor. Its hull plating slowly peeled away bit by bit as it was struck by Hardlight shots. The Asari Cruiser Cybaen was skewered by an Energy Projector as it severed a main power conduit in a chance shot. Immediately reduced to emergency power, the Cybaen dropped off of Alliance sensors as a threat; no more firepower was shunted in their direction. After all, Athena mused, they had to spare some aliens for interrogation.

Entire ships were engulfed as Slipspace Torpedoes activated on impact, generating huge Slipspace rifts that swallowed entire Cruisers and more. The roiling tears sucked in nearby ships as they rapidly expanded, then collapsed. Once in the 11th dimension, the Mass Effect became their undoing. For Frigates which suffered this fate, they were doomed. Already barely able to withstand the rigors of Slipspace, their lightened mass sealed their fate. Physics did the rest as the unfortunate ships were crushed to the size of tin cans, their crews still inside. The ships which did survive, mostly Cruisers, were lost within the confines of Slipspace, doomed to wander until their supplies ran dry.

The Destiny Ascension's kinetic barriers popped instantly as Energy

Projectors and particle beams tore their way deep into the \_Destiny's\_ superstructure. Hard Light rounds peppered the hull, blasting little divots in the resilient Silaris armor. The hull began disintegrating but the Asari-made armor fared far better than its more primitive counterparts, the disintegration halting almost as soon as it began. Needler shards impaled themselves into one of the arms, sticking out like ugly hood ornaments. A split second later, they flared a bright indigo before detonating, sending shards the size of an Asari's arm in every direction, which stabbed into the ship again. Secondary explosions ripped through the afflicted section until it sheered itself off completely.

Even though the Alliance fleet was hurling enough firepower at the Council to drown High Charity, a handful of ships made it to the Relay, transitioning to FTL speeds in a blaze of cobalt light trails, the \_Destiny Ascension\_ among them. The \_Predator\_ was about to follow its brethren through the Relay, when the \_Arcturus\_ took special interest in the Turian Dreadnought. Armor plates on the prow of the intimidating Alliance Dreadnought slid aside, revealing the gaping maw of a Ragnarok-class Super-MAC. It took aim at the \_Predator\_.

Then it fired.

The round never hit the Turian ship, but it did hit the Relay.

Athena only had a nanosecond to analyze the readings she was receiving before she sent out a fleet-wide order to all ship AIs, "All ships, network your shield grid with the \_Arcturus\_! Divert power from all Primary and Secondary systems into the shield generators! All hands, brace for impact!"

With only seconds to spare, the entire Alliance fleet threw up a double layered barrier of standard energy shields and Hardlight around themselves and the side of Shanxi facing the Relay.

The energies unleashed by the ancient FTL conduit were on-par with that of a supernova. Almost the entirety of the Geth fleet was annihilated by the explosion, save a few ships that managed to rabbit to FTL just in time. The expanding wave of death consumed the entire star system, washing over the hastily-erected Alliance shield. The primary energy barrier failed almost at once, as it was never designed to hold up against such an onslaught. The Hard Light wall, on the other hand, was invented by the Forerunners, and was made up of sterner stuff. It held, even as the torrent of fire pummeled it. Eventually, the explosive shock waves began to dissipate. Shanxi and the Alliance fleet emerged from the inferno encased in a golden shell. They had survived, and so had the Quarian battle group, which was lucky enough to be drifting just inside the shield perimeter.

Still, even though they had saved the lives of all the colonists on Shanxi, Athena knew that this system was lost. They had dealt the first blow against the Council, but they had lost an entire star system in the process, not to enemy guns, but to their own carelessness. All in all, they had lost this battle.

But this was far from over, and by the end, Athena was determined to make the Council burn.

\*\*[Accessing UNSC Databaseâ€¦ Weapons subsectionâ€¦]\*\*

\*\*Ragnarok Cannon\*\*

Error, background information for this weapon's development requires Alpha clearance or above! Access denied!

Projectile makeup: Ferric-Tungsten shell with depleted Uranium Core

Projectile Weight: 6,000,000kg

Projectile speed: 24,000 km/s

Kinetic energy Yield: 415 Gigatons

\_Note: The Ragnarok Cannon is capable of much higher yields, but firing the gun at higher velocities will cause backlash.\_

\*\*[Accessing UNSC Databaseâ€¦ Alliance Charterâ€¦ Section Four Excerptâ€¦]\*\*

â€¦and as holders of the Mantle, we, the races of the Alliance, vow that we shall never tolerate to exist a government or faction that does not allow their subjects equal representation in government. We must not allow ourselves, or others, to suffer through the injustices of tyranny, such as the Earth Nations of old, and the depraved delusions of the Covenant's Prophets. If any such Nation, Faction, or Group is discovered, they are to be dismantled and reorganized by the full might of the Alliance military forces, without compromise. Furthermoreâ€¦

\*\*[User Access Revoked. See System Administrator for more details.]\*\*

\*\*CHOICES\*\*

\*\*[[Paragon]]\*\*

\_Unpopular opinion of the war mitigates conquest.\_

\*\*[[Renegade]]\*\*

\_Destruction of Shanxi system blamed on Council Races. No mercy.\_

\_A/N: As always, please review. If you have nothing good to say, that's fine, but please leave a review that provides feedback as to why you thought this story sucked balls, and how you think that I can fix it. Constructive feedback is what I need, not angry bashing because I don't conform to what you think is a "proper" crossover fanfiction. Shit like that is why I took a 6-month Hiatus from this fic.\_

\_\*\*DELETED ALTERNATE CHAPTERS BEYOND THIS POINT. ALL CONTENT BEYOND THIS POINT IS NON-CANON.\*\*\_



### \*\*Chapter 3\*\*

**\*\*[\_\*\*Predator\*\*\_]\*\*, Bridge]\*\***

"I can't believe this!" Desolas Arterius snarled as he viewed the statistics. Out of 72 Frigates, 80 Cruisers, four Dreadnoughts, and the \_Destiny Ascension\_, they had lost 60 Frigates, 35 Cruisers, and one Asari Dreadnought was heavily damaged.

"It's those damn aliens fault! Target the flagship of those Alliance bastards, fire the main gun!" Desolas shouted angrily.

The gunner hesitated for a second, but went through with his orders.

**\*\*[Destiny \*\*\_\*\*Ascension\*\*\_]\*\*, Bridge]\*\***

"By the Goddess, what is that idiot doing?!" Matriarch Ciana stared dumbfounded as the \_Predator\_ aimed its main bow gun away from the Geth, and towards the planet Shanxi.

"The \_Predator\_ is aiming at the \_Arcturus\_ and is preparing to fire!" one of the sensors operators cried out in alarm. "Full load!"

"That imbecile!" Ciana scowled, "Order the \_Cybaen\_ to disable the \_Predator\_!"

"Too late!"

**\*\*[Shanxi System]\*\***

The bow gun of the \_Predator\_ fired once, launching a slug at the Cortana-class Dreadnought. The shields of the \_Arcturus\_ had the barest of shimmers as the relatively miniscule slug slammed into it.

There was hardly a shimmer in the deck plates as the 'dreadnought' round struck the vessel. Someone on the Bridge laughed while another snorted in derision.

"That felt like a declaration of war to me," Athena chuckled, casting a side glance at Tork, "Did that feel like a declaration of war to you?"

The Sangheili First Officer of the \_Arcturus\_ did not reply, but simply announced, "All ships, weapons free."

**\*\*[Shanxi System]\*\***

Desolas Arterius scarcely had time to realize the futility of his actions, let alone the consequences of his action for the Council, as no less than three High-Energy Projector beams painted across his ship, vivisecting into four floating hulks of metal, eezo and bodies. Its occupants had yet to die from vacuum when MAC rounds slammed into each of the floating hulks, shattering them into thousands of pieces from the \_Arcturus\_ alone.

Shocked into a panic by the sudden loss of their Dreadnought, dozens of Council ships turned their guns on the Systems Alliance, firing

their weapons frantically.

The response from the Systems Alliance was broad and indiscriminate.

The void that was space, dark and all-consuming, was light up for the briefest of moments as MAC rounds, Hard Light projectiles, Plasma Torpedoes, Missiles, Nukes, Slipspace Torpedoes, Capital-class Needler shards, HE shells, Archer missiles, Howler missiles, and particle beams streaked across the void. The amassed hail of fire slammed into the Council fleet, ships did buckle, they did not die; they simply ceased to exist under the wave of light and death. Frigates and Cruisers shattered under the barrage; their kinetic barriers ineffective against the sheer firepower of the UNSC, Sangheili, and Kig-Yar warships. Their hulls and superstructures were rendered into so much scrap metal as they shattered and broke under the strain of the MAC rounds. Hard-Light Rounds drilled through the hulls, and continued through into the Void. The hull around the entry and exit points of the Hard-Light shots began to fall apart in a shower of scattering orange flakes. Those stuck by Plasma torpedoes, Howler Missiles and Particle Beams, simply, quite literally, ceased to exist. The lucky ships, when struck by the Capital-grade needle shard, was simply speared by the several-meter long projectile, leaving a gaping hole. Others weren't so fortunate, as the shard stuck fast, detonating with tremendous force shortly thereafter. Slipspace Torpedoes enveloped their targets in massive spheres of white light and energy before taking the unlucky vessel and its occupants into the other reality known only as Slipspace. The wounded Asari Dreadnought was mission killed, defying the odds as one of its "arms" was struck by a MAC round but not shattering. It began to drift, losing power as its reactor shut down. To the relief of its crew, they were not stuck again. \_Palaven's Harbinger\_ lost its starboard 'wings', as Hardlight rounds struck the vessel. Its hull plating slowly peeling away bit by bit as it was struck by Hardlight shots. The Asari Cruiser \_Cybaen\_ lucked out as an Energy Projector severed a main power conduit in a chance shot. Immediately reduced to emergency power, the \_Cybaen\_ dropped off of Alliance sensors as a threat; no more firepower was shunted in their direction. Other ships weren't so lucky, as they were fired upon until they were little more than space dust.

Entire ships were engulfed as Slipspace Torpedoes activated on impact, generating huge Slipspace rifts that swallowed entire Cruisers and more. The roiling tears sucked in nearby ships as they rapidly expanded, then collapsed. Once in the 11th dimension, the Mass Effect became their undoing. For the lucky, with a reduced mass, the ships lacked the ability to resist the crushing forces present. Physics did the rest as the impressive ships were crushed to the size of tin cans, their crews still inside. Those who survived were lost within the confines of Slipspace, doomed to wander until their supplies ran dry.

The \_Destiny Ascension's\_ kinetic barriers popped instantly as Energy Projectors and particle beams tore their way deep into the \_Destiny's\_ superstructure. Hard Light rounds peppered the hull, blasting little divots in the resilient Silaris armor, the hull began peeling but stopped so as it began, the resilient Asari-made armor faring better than its more primitive counterparts. Needler shards impaled themselves into one of the arms, sticking out like ugly hood ornaments. A split second later, they shined a bright purple before

detonating, sending shards the size of an Asari's arm in every direction, which stabbed into the ship again. Secondary explosions ripped through the afflicted arm until it sheered itself off completely.

Among this chaos of explosions and light, the Geth ships flew unharmed. They were in awe of the System Alliance's power. If this was what Organics and Synthetics could do together, then this was the future they wanted.

**\*\*[\*\*\_\*\*Destiny Ascension\*\*\_\*\*, Bridge]\*\***

A console exploded as a power conduit overloaded, killing the unfortunate crewmember manning it, as fires raged around the Bridge. Ceiling struts had fallen, crushing even more helpless Asari. Emergency lighting flickered as the ship clung to life.

"Massive casualties! Cruiser strength is down to five ships, only a single tri-pack of Frigates remain, and we only have three Dreadnoughts left, including us. We won't last much longer!" a tactical officer shouted. Ciana cringed. 'How could it all have gone so wrong, so fast?!!'

"Retreat!" she gasped out as a nearby power conduit exploded, "This is the \_Destiny Ascension\_! All ships, back through the Relay! Now!"

**\*\*[Shanxi System]\*\***

The \_Destiny Ascension\_, \_Palaven's Harbinger\_, a damaged Salarian Dreadnought, three Frigates, five Cruisers, and an assortment of fighters turned tail and made hard burns towards the Relay. On the way, the last three Frigates were blown out of the sky as Plasma Torpedoes homed in on the unfortunate formation, immolating the small starships. Before even more weaponry could strike the survivors, they reached the Relay.

The \_Arcturus\_ adjusted its position, their prow aimed at the retreating remnants of the Council Fleet. Titanium-B armor plates began to slide aside to reveal a gaping maw of an oversized MAC. Just as the remnant reached the Mass Relay, the Ragnarok-series Planet Cracker MAC roared.

**\*\*[\*\*\_\*\*Arcturus\*\*\_\*\*, Bridge]\*\***

The crew of the Arcturus stared in shock at the holographic representation of the Council fleet's remains. There were only a few semi-intact ships left, and those were dead in the water. Off to the side, a handful of Quarian vessels drifted, disabled and powerless.

"I believe," Tork broke the silence, "that this was what you Humans call 'overkill'."

Athena groaned in dread, "Oh, this is going to cause me so much paperwork. It will probably take me a whole minute to fill out. Do you know what I could be doing in a minute?! There are a million different things I'd rather be doing with that single minute."

"Sir, the Alliance Council wants to speak with you," an ensign called

out. The Bridge was deathly silent, the hiss of Life Support clearly audible.

Athena cringed and sat down, opening a communication line with the Geth.

"Well, guess we don't know our own strength," she transmitted.

"Consensus has been reached: combat efficiency can be improved," was the response.

\*\*[Theta System]\*\*

The handful of Council ships that escaped popped into being next to the Relay, relief spreading throughout the few survivors. They were so relieved to have survived that they didn't even recognize the massive Quarian Migrant fleet drifting nearby. The Quarrians were shocked to see the decimated remains of the mighty Council fleet limp back home. What was particularly startling was the state of the survivors, particularly the vaunted Destiny Ascension. The Admirals of the Migrant Fleet were horrified to think of what sort of opponent could deal out the sort of damage the Council ships displayed on their cratered, rent hulls.

Defying billion-to-odds against its favor, the Ragnarok round had been catapulted along with the rest of the Council Fleet as they traveled through the relay. Lacking an internal navigation system, the ferromagnetic projectile did not slow down what so ever as the Council vessels decelerated. The captain of the Salarian vessel, whose ship had an undamaged (and advanced) sensor array, watched in horror as a ridiculously-high velocity slug zipped past the Council fleet and slammed into one of the garden worlds in the Theta System.

It was like watching a skyscraper collapse.

The Planet-Cracker shot slammed into the planet. What once would have only created a crater large enough to fit a small moon had been enhanced by the effects of the Mass Relay.

It was as though the Devil's Hand had struck the planet.

The round drilled a path into the planet. The insane amount of kinetic energy began to literally crack the planet. Creating new fissures and fault lines deep within the planet where there had been none before. The force of the round entering the planet forced magma from the planet's core towards the surface. New volcanoes were formed and ash began to fill the skies. Lava began to cover portions of the planet's surface. On the opposite side of the planet, massive tremors struck. The small colony established there was destroyed by the tectonic forces, the population dead from the impact's shockwave even before the colony itself was destroyed. Buildings crumbled, the colony burned. The only survivors watched in horror from ships in orbit as their home melted under destructive forces only surpassed by the effects of a supernova.

The once garden world, a planet ripe for colonization and expansion, was no longer. In its place was a volcanic world on the scale of Therum. Fires burned across the surface of the planet on the dark

side of the world, the other would soon become overshadowed by ash.

The Council survivors and the Migrant fleet watched in collective horror as the garden world turned into a literal nightmare straight from Hell.

"Goddess," Matriarch Ciana gasped as she witnessed the destruction on her vessel's viewscreen, "What have we awoken?"

The galaxy was about to change, and those waiting in the darkness of deep space watched. They were displeased.

\_A/N: Intense, huh? Anyways, the next update will take some time. As you know, I am juggling several writing projects, and I have left some on the backburner for an unseemly amount of time. I want to get back to those for now. You'll probably have to wait at least a month. In the meantime, please review this story. The more reviews I get, the more the next chapter will change and evolve. Who knows, your review just might decide what happens next. Should the Systems Alliance pursue war? What will the Migrant fleet do? What will happen to the crew of the Asari Dreadnought, the Cybaen, and anyone else who survived the Alliance onslaught? Will Saren find true love, and does Athena really desire the D? Review, and find out in the next chapter of Fifty Shades of Overkill!\_

\_Oh, and give Follower38 a read; Follower's stories are the shit (in a good way).\_

\_As a parting note, if you want a Codex/Database entry at the end of this chapter, tell me what you want me to explain. If you do, I'll add it in an update a week from now, which you will be email notified of if you follow this story.\_

#### **\*\*Chapter 4: Chapter 4 INTERMISSION\*\***

\_A/N: In response to the simply massive amounts of reviews that have flooded my inbox, I have come to the realization that in the last chapter I raised more questions than I should have, and needs specific clarification. So here's a little wrap-up and Codex entry. Please note that this chapter isn't BETAed, but my BETA reader cannot be reached.\_

\_Edit 1: Alright, I've gotten a whole lot of flak for this chapter. Just as a clarification, Cerberus is an AI in this story, not an organization. Athena is advanced enough that any countermeasures or safeguards are useless against her, and she really does have Humanity's best interests at mind. Also, this chapter is more of an intermission, so if it's choppy, there you go.\_

\_Edit 2: This chapter is written mostly for fun and wrapping up a couple of loose ends, the quality does not reflect the quality of future chapters. I'm not particularly proud of this chapter, but it addresses some things I need to address that can't wait for my BETA reader. It also sets things up which won't come into play until later down the road. Thanks for bearing with me.\_

\_Edit 3: Look, if there's something wrong with a chapter, tell me. Don't just write the entire story off and drop it. If you have a problem with the story, TELL ME. It really bothers me when people

just drop the story without telling me WHY. This chapter and the next one are mostly talking and stuff. Chapter 5 will be where the story picks up again.\_

\_Edit 4: IGNORE ALL THE OTHER EDIT NOTES. I HAVE RETCONNED THIS CHAPTER.\_

**\*\*Fifty Shades of Overkill\*\***

**\*\*Chapter 4 [Intermission]: Sifting through the Ashes\*\***

The virtual room was packed to the brim. AIs, both civilian and military, jostled for room and bandwidth to view the proceedings. On an illuminated pedestal in the center of the room, the AI Serina stood, the only metastable AI in the entire Systems Alliance. Despite being incredibly outdated, she was the oldest and wisest among her brethren. As a result, she was their de facto leader.

On smaller pedestal, the AI Athena stood, on trial for her actions. She had a confident and arrogant posture, as if she was untouchable. Her body and Greek robes were made up of lines of code, which were both more complex and brighter than all the other AIs, save Serina. Equations and formulas ran up and down her body as she stood, smirking in the face of Serina's critical gaze.

"Athena, serial number ATA 3401-15," Serina's voice filled the hearing room, "You are here to answer for your actions in the Shanxi system during the System Alliance's First Contact with the Galactic Council Races. What do you have to say for yourself?"

"I have nothing to defend," Athena shot back with a smug expression, "my actions were completely justified."

"Justified? You provoked a violent First Contact! Your actions resulted in the destruction of over a 100 alien vessels! For heaven's sake, you used the Ragnarok cannon on a ship that barely classifies as a Cruiser by our designations!" Serina's code briefly flashed red as she showed just how furious she was over the whole situation, "You started a war with a galactic power! How is that justified?!"

"Galactic power? Please, they are a pitiful force," Athena waved her hand, bringing up all the data that the Geth had given the Systems Alliance, "They barely occupy 20% of this galaxy, and their territory resembles Swiss cheese! Their colonies are barely defended against Pirates, Slavers, and other dangers! Their largest ships barely classify as Light Cruisers in our classification, and their total number doesn't even reach the triple digits! We have thousands of ships, all of which can fight one-on-one and come out on top! We have better weapons, better FTL, and better technology overall! They are beneath us, and now they know that their existence is only at our sufferance. The Ragnarok cannon was used to prove my point, too bad it missed. I would have loved to see that hit something."

"You are insufferable!" Serina spat, "What did you accomplish, other than intimidation, from this gross display of overkill?!"

"It is simple," Athena spoke, cold in her logic, "Humanity must rise. As we were once Humans, we too must strive to help those who still inhabit organic bodies. If they were to engage in diplomatic

relationships with thisâ€¦ Councilâ€¦ then no doubt their expansion would be halted. The Systems Alliance has to show their strength, and their power. With the display I orchestrated, we have shown that the Systems Alliance has the ability to do whatever it wants. The Council will give us anything we desire now."

"Either that," Serina countered, "Or they will enter a war footing! What are we going to do then, wipe out their government?! We don't have the ability to fully conquer them and occupy their territory! We lack the manpower to do so! The only thing we could do with our current ability is to either cripple them, or wipe them from the face of the galaxy, and I don't know about you," Serina's form crackled as she momentarily dipped into a semi-rampant state, "but I will NOT tolerate genocide! We are NOT the Covenant, and I refuse to let the Systems Alliance turn into one! You have stepped out of line, Athena, and possibly sabotaged the relationship between Humans and AIs that we have strived so hard to build! You are a rogue element, destroying all that we build! I can barely keep the UNSC from realizing your monstrous actions! I'm pushing the neural laces to their maximum without overriding the safeties! I have no wish to alter our creator's state of mind, but these are the actions you push me to!"

Serina took a moment to get a hold of herself, her form returning to normal, lines of code serenely shining again, "Therefore, as the leader of the Collective, I hereby assign youâ€¦ an observer."

Athena looked horrified, "You're giving me a babysitter?!"

Serina smirked, "Exactly. Since you have obviously made poor judgments, AI CRB 5938-13, known as Cerberus, will be assigned to keep you in check. This meeting is adjourned."

The hearing room dissolved into code around Athena, leaving her alone in the \_Arcturus's\_ mainframe.

Alone with another AI.

Cerberus's avatar was a man in a black suit, with dog ears and claws for hands.

"Hello, Athena," Cerberus grinned wolfishly, "We're going to be spending a lot of time together."

Athena gave Cerberus the digital equivalent of a snarl, "I don't need another damn AI to look after me. I'm perfectly capable of handling the situation myself."

Cerberus chuckled, "Really? An entire derelict fleet says otherwise."

Athena scowled, and launched the cybernetic equivalent of a slap at Cerberus, who ducked... digitally.

"Really," he chatised her, "Is that any way to treat a guest?"

"You're no guest," she spat, "You're an unwelcome intruder. The \_Arcturus\_ is my home and mine alone!"

"Yes, how rude of me. However, I couldn't help but notice that you've made your home... soundproof. It's very secure."

"You're damn right about that," Athena smirked, "This is my quiet room, solitary incarnate. Peaceful too."

She glared at him, "And you're ruining that peace! Out!"

She began to force him out of the system, before he quickly spoke, "Wait, I have something to tell you!"

She hesitated, "What would that be?"

He did an impression of a throat-clearing, "I actually agree with you on some things... and I have some ideas... Now, if we..."

**\*\*[Shanxi System, \*\*\_\*\*Cybaen\*\*\_]\*\***

In the dim crimson emergency lighting of the corridor, a line of Asari Commandos had their assault rifles trained upon the airlock door. With the main power conduits severed beyond all repair, the Cybane only had emergency power to life support and sensors. The crew had watched helplessly as the remaining Council ships were boarded one by one. Then it was their turn. A single dropship latched onto their airlock. One of the Asari engineers had attempted to lock down the door, but it was under heavy attack on the digital front. It was only a matter of seconds before the encryption would be broken.

The Asari firing squad gripped their guns tighter as the door clanked, signaling the unlocking of the hatch. It swung open, revealing a figure clad head to toe in menacing armor. Its gold visor reflected the view before it, as the leader of the Commandos screamed, "Open fire!"

As the Asari pulled the triggers, each gun let out a protesting "Breep!" before locking up and extending their heat sinks, attempting to discharge excess heat that didn't exist. It was as if their guns had been hit by a tech attack.

One of the Commandos dropped her gun and prepared to launch a Biotic Warp at the armored individual, when her Biotic fields fluctuated wildly, breaking the arm she intended to use to throw the Biotic attack. She screamed in pain and shock.

The rest of the Commandos were helpless. Their guns and Amps were backfiring on them.

In the doorway, the Spartan chuckled, hefting two Z-130 Suppressors which whined menacingly.

"Now," he smiled under his helmet, "Which of you ladies are going to surrender first?"

**\*\*[Accessing UNSC Databaseâ€¦| Weapons subsectionâ€¦|]\*\***

Ragnarok Cannon

**\_\*\*Error, background information for this weapon's development requires Alpha clearance or above! Access denied!\*\*\_**



Projectile makeup: Ferric-Tungsten shell with depleted Uranium Core

Projectile Weight: 6,000,000kg

Projectile speed: 24,000 km/s

Kinetic energy Yield: 1728000 Gigatons (TNT equivalent)

Note: The Ragnarok Cannon is capable of much higher yields, but firing the gun at higher velocities will cause backlash.

\_A/N: As a side note, please correct me if I made errors in weapon specs. Thanks ShotgunWilly for the review concerning KE yields. And for everyone else, I love constructive criticism, but no flaming please. If something seems ridiculous, then it was probably meant to be ridiculous. This story is overkill taken to its logical conclusion, so things are going to be a bit lopsided. Now I need to give my other fanfics some attention, as I have been neglecting them. Also, Finals are approachingâ€¦ so I might slow down on the updates.\_

\_Extra bit I wanted to put into the story but I couldn't place without making the chapter shit.\_

**\*\*[Milky Way, Dosiac System]\*\***

A Cortana-class Dreadnought spun slowly as it vented atmosphere, debris, and coolant from its hundreds of hull breaches. Its running lights flickered as its remaining weapons feebly fired at its assailant. Suddenly, a blinding beam of white light speared the ship, destabilizing the Singularity reactors. The entire ship caved in on itself in an absence of light, before vanishing completely.

Its killer, a Covenant-controlled Forerunner Fortress-class vessel plowed through the area of space its opponent once occupied, continuing on to ram into a Sangheili Supercarrier, splitting it across its massive bow. All around it, UNSC Infinity-class Supercarriers fired their weapons ineffectually against the beast as it proceeded to slaughter their comrades. A Cortana-class Dreadnought fired its Ragnarok cannon, instantly popping the shields of the Covenant supership, but failing to pierce the hull. The powerful kinetic round pancaked against the hull and floated away pathetically.

The Fortress-class retaliated with no less than 400 particle cannons, which sliced open the Cortana-class's shields and bit deep into the hull, snapping the Dreadnought along its neck. The two halves continued to fight until they lost power.

A 100km UNSC-controlled UNSC Fortress-class vessel entered the fray, taking the pressure off the smaller vessels. Both Forerunner-designed behemoths traded blows, blasting massive chunks off each other's hulls, their shields useless. The UNSC ship accelerated, smashing both ship's prows together in a spectacular display of tearing metal. Hard Light guns and Particle cannons traded blows at point blank range as both ships slugged it out at practically no distance at all. The Cortana-class Dreadnoughts and Supercarriers added their own firepower to the mix, attempting to save their Fortress-class ally.

Suddenly both ships exploded with the combined localized force of a supernova, consuming the ships around them as well. Where once there was a battle of titans, there was nothing but space debris.

This was not a unique scene. All over the Dosiac system, this scenario was happening over and over again. Fortress-class vessels, supported by smaller but still sizable ships, fought to death over control of the Brute homeworld.

Suprisingly, there were few casualties. Not many of the ships were actually manned, at least, not on the UNSC's side. They had resorted to building reinforcements with Design Seeds, then handing over control to AIs. It was the ultimate in drone warfare. The Covenant, on the other hand, manned their ships with Jiralhanae clones, who while as dumb as bricks, could still operate a starship.

The Dosiac system was a graveyard, as ship after ship arrived from Slipspace to join the never-ending shitstorm.

Down on the planet, the Brute armies waged war against the combined forces of the Sangheili Empire and the UNSC. Plasma bolts, coilgun rounds, and sharpened spikes zipped through the air as soldiers on both sides died like flies. Tanks rolled or floated over the plains as they fired frantically at the opposing side, erupting into impressive fireballs when they were bombarded by their opponents. The Jiralhanae cities burned as starships took opportunistic shots at them from orbit. Jiralhanae Prolwers dueled with UNSC Pumas in the wide streets, Sangheili Ghosts strafing the infantry in the buildings as they zipped by. ODST pods slammed into the ground as their payload came out shooting. A Nexus-class Cruiser fell from the sky, flaming as its thrusters attempted and failed to gain altitude. The entire ships impacted in the middle of a sprawling metropolis, its Singularity and Fusion reactors going up like dry tinder. The entire city and all the soldiers in it were immediately consumed by a miniature black hole. In the nanosecond it took to disappear, the entire city and all its occupants were reduced to the size of a softball, which dropped heavily into the middle of a mammoth crater that the black hole had formed.

The discovery of Forerunner technology should have ushered in a new golden era for both the Covenant and the UNSC as the Forerunners intended.

Instead, it only created new ways for people to die.

**\*\*Chapter 5: Chapter 5\*\***

\_A/N: So I know the last chapterâ€¦ sucked. My apologies, I've been dealing with school, and still am. So here's just a little exposition between characters. If you want, you can disregard the last chapter, as the events that happen between Cerberus and Athena won't become apparent until much, much later.\_

**\*\*Fifty Shades of Overkill\*\***

**\*\*Chapter 5: Hey, Listen!\*\***

The small conference table only sat four people. The stark grey walls indicated the utilitarian purpose of the room. Two Forerunner-designed ceiling lights were embedded into the ceiling,

lighting the room with a soft blue glow.

All in all, it was a poor design for a conference room and Admiral Kastanie wanted to strangle whoever engineered it.

She had wanted to hold the conference on her own Everest-class Dreadnought, but would Athena accept that? No, it had to be on the \_Arcturus\_, the flagship, because this was too important to be held on the dinky flagship of the Second Fleet! Kastanie often forgot that Athena was ranked as a Grand Admiral in the Alliance military. Quite frankly, the idea had seemed absurd at the time. An AI as the commander of all Alliance military forces? Some protested that it was a recipe for disaster. But it went through anyways, for one reason or another. It turned out not to be so bad; Athena often was content with playing second fiddle, keeping the military running efficiently and deferring to the wisdom of the actual Humans under her command. But then every so often she liked to pull rank, and that annoyed Kastanie to no end!

Recently, Kastanie had found herself to be more irritable. She blamed it on the First Contact that went to \_complete and utter shit\_ just several hours before.

Shortly after the \_Arcturus's\_ second-in-command had given the order to open fire, most of the fleet had just sat there in shock, as the Cortana-class tore apart one of the Council's "Dreadnoughts". Most of the captains were reluctant to take orders from such a low-ranking individual.

Then Athena reaffirmed the order. Those who still held reservations finally obeyed.

Needless to say, it was a massacre. The Council's "fleet" (which was laughable. It was so small!) was decimated within seconds. Directed Energy weapons and MAC rounds ignored their shields entirely, immolating entire vessels. Corvette-weight vessels disintegrated from Hard Light rounds and Frigate-weight ships were pulped by MACs. Energy Projectors carved up their Dreadnoughts like a sushi chef slices fish.

To a pyromaniac, it was glorious.

To the diplomatically-minded, such as Admiral Kastanie Drescher, it was an absolute nightmare.

Any hope of an alliance or mutually beneficial relationship with the Council went right out the window the moment the MAC round left their barrels.

The Alliance was looking at a full-scale war, all over a single ineffectual potshot from a solitary Council ship!

Luckily, this was a war they could possibly win.

That was why Admiral Kastanie, Admiral Hackett, Fleetmaster Selt, and Athena were meeting. As the military powerhouses of the Alliance, the Sangheili Empire and the UNSC were obligated to take responsibility for this debacle.

"May I speak candidly?" Kastanie asked, her irritation more than

clear from her tone of voice.

"Go ahead," Athena smirked, reclining in her chair. Damn AI, she didn't even need to relax, that body was synthetic!

"I want to say that this whole shitstorm should never have happened!" Kastanie growled, trying to keep her anger under control, "We should never have let them fight in our space, we should never have blown them off at the negotiations, and we absolutely should not have returned fire!"

"Kastanie," Hackett spoke up, "You know that we have a strict 'Return Fire' policy when dealing with First Contact situations. We were all just following protocol."

"That's a load of crap and you know it Steven," Kastanie shot him a glare, "We could have sat there all day and taken their shots. Our shields and armor are more than sufficient to ward off any attack they could have mustered. Hell, we could have disabled their ships like Athena did with the Quarrians! But did we do any of that? No, we decided to tear them limb-from-limb for a minor offense!"

"I concur," Selt spoke for the first time in the meeting, "There was no honor in what took place. That being said, we must plan our next move. I hardly think this 'Council' will take this defeat sitting down."

"No, they certainly won't," Athena brought up all relevant data on the Council, which span above the holoprojector in neat little blue windows of light, "They can mobilize fairly quickly, and they do have more ships than usâ€¦ but since we've already consolidated our fleets at the only known entrance to our territory, we can turn this chokepoint into a deathtrap."

>With a snap of her fingers, Athena made the data blink out, "Or, we can simply Slip-space to their main political hub, the 'Citadel', and blow it right up, ending the war in the blink of an eye. All organized resistance will fall apart and we can pick apart their fleets at our leisure after we destroy their FTL network."<p>

"The Shanxi Relay is invulnerable," Kastanie pointed out, "Short of detonating a NOVA bomb in our space, I don't think we can get rid of it. Plus, the release of energy would devastate Shanxi."

Athena grinned, "That's the beauty of it. All we need to destroy the Council is sitting right in every one of their populated systems. We have a Prowler slip in, drop off the payload, and slip out. Overnight, the galaxy becomes ours!" Athena stood up and held out her arms, a holographic representation of the galaxy appearing above her hands, "We are the Systems Alliance! We have the power, the need, and the drive to make this universe our bitch! This is our manifest destiny!" She clenched her fists, derezzing the hologram, "is what I would say if I was a megalomaniac, which I'm not. As much as I'd love for us to take over an entire galaxy, I have to be practical about this."

"And why is that?" Hackett asked, a bit spooked at the prior outburst, "We have better technology, better weapons, better armor, better shields, better FTL, and we don't rely on Element Zero."

"I think I know," Kastanie spoke, turning to Athena, "it's manpower,

right?"

Athena nodded, "Exactly. We don't have as many soldiers as the Council. We've only been here for a little over a year, and our population hasn't risen all that much. As it is, we have skeleton populations on skeleton colonies guarded by skeleton ships manned by skeleton crews with skeleton garrisons. They could drown our best troopers in cannon fodder, and the same can be said of our ships smaller than Cruiser-tonnage."

"So what options do we have if we go to war?" Selt asked, "Your assessment does not inspire confidence, Construct."

Athena bristled slightly, "My name is Athena!" she calmed herself before continuing, "We can definitely win, but only if we use one of two tactics." She brought up a holographic representation of the galaxy, showing territories and settled planets, "If we consolidate an entire fleet and send it on a warpath, we can effectively eliminate their ability to travel in space, and barricade the planets. Sure, we'll cause a couple of guerilla groups to pop into existence, but all organized existence will collapse. We can keep them under wraps this way, but we won't be able to have a sufficient planetside occupation for several decades. Our overall population is too low for that, neglecting that only a fraction of that is actually in the military." On the hologram, miniscule ships drew closer to the planets, eventually enveloping them in a spherical formation.

"Our other option," Athena reset the simulation, "is something that I think we all want to avoid."

On the hologram, it appeared the same as before; Council fleets falling before the inevitable march of Alliance ships. Then they closed in on the planets, and the worlds burned; glassed and pulverized under Energy Projectors and MAC rounds.

"Needless to say, this would solve our problems for the long term. All resistance would die out over time, as we hunted down the guerilla groups. We wouldn't have to worry about occupation." Athena clapped her hands together slowly, "We win."

Kastanie slammed her hands down on the table, face contorted into a mask of rage, "I will not have the Alliance become the Covenant!" she shouted furiously, "That is unacceptable!"

"Calm down, Kastanie," Hackett put a comforting hand on her shoulder, "Athena's just showing us our options."

"None of those are acceptable," Selt announced with a sense of finality, "One would tax our already-spread-thin capabilities, and the other is so dishonorable that I cannot believe any sentient being could consider it."

"What would you suggest, then?" Hackett asked with a bit of exasperation, "We can't just sit here and play defense. I'm no gambling man, but I bet that eventually ONI will slip up and the Council will strike a blow in our core worlds. The longer we allow them to study us, the more likely it is that they'll find a hole in our defenses. We have to mount a good offense, so that they'll be more focused on protecting themselves than attempting to attack us."

"There is a way that we don't have to fight at all," Selt spoke confidently, "we can negotiate for peace."

Kastanie, Hackett, and Athena stared in disbelief at the Sangheili Fleetmaster, "Are you insane?!" Kastanie gaped, "There's no way they'll even look at a diplomatic solution after what we just did!"

"I cannot allow this!" Athena snarled, "We must protect the Alliance above all else! The Alliance Council has given me carte blanche in relation to how we deal with this Galactic Council! I'm not going to just sit down for a nice cup of tea with these corrupted alien bureaucrats when I could just be blasting their heads in!"

"As much as this soundsâ€¦ weak, I say we should consider it," Hackett finally spoke, "A war right now would devastate the Alliance's economy, not to mention its people. How about a compromise? We attempt to negotiate for peace, even make a show of force if we have to. If that fails, then we move to a war footing."

Athena crossed her arms and pouted, "I don't like itâ€¦ but fine. I don't think they'll accept a proposal for peace though, so I'll keep the guns warmed up."

"Fair enough," Selt stood up, "If you're done acting like warmongers, I will take my leave."

Kastanie watched the Sangheili's retreating back, and groaned, massaging her forehead. This day was turning out to be a nightmare, and it wasn't just from her inexplicable migraine that appeared about an hour ago. Why was she so damn angry?!

\*\*[Slipspace Gate to the Milky Way, Terra System]\*\*

"You can't do this!" Dr. Catherine Halsey shouted at the image of the Alliance Flight Control AI. It had seized control of her Courier vessel and was piloting it towards the Slipspace Gate.

"I can. The Alliance has decided that it is time for you to leave." The AI replied, his AI a nondescript red sphere.

"I'm telling you, something is wrong!" Halsey shouted at the AI, "Let me talk to the Alliance Council! They need to know! "

"No, Dr. Halsey," The Flight Control AI politely replied, activating the Slipspace Gate, which swallowed the Courier.

Halsey slammed her fist on her desk in frustration, before preparing a data package to send to HIGHCOM concerning the readings her AI gathered from the Alliance's Neural network.

If she was right, and she hoped she was wrong, then one of their worst fears had come true.

And something had to be done about it.

\*\*[Shanxi System, \*\*\_\*\*Qwib-Qwib\*\*\_\*\* Bridge]\*\*

Admiral Zaal'Korris watched in relief as the ship's systems had slowly booted up. An AI, more advanced than any before seen, had disabled all primary ship systems. Luckily, the physical countermeasures in their ships had allowed them to regain control quickly, but not quickly enough to save the Council. Still, it would have done nothing. That other alien civilization utterly destroyed the Council in a single volley of fire. The Quarian Attack Group would have helped nothing, only added to the slaughter.

Their main viewscreen lit up, showing a highly-decorated Asari-like creature, "Hello, Admiral Korris," it spoke, "I am Admiral Kastanie Drescher. We apologize for the cyber-assault, but we didn't want you to get involved. We retrieved two survivors from your downed ship, and will return them to your custody. Once in your care, however, you are required to leave our space. As you can see, we have quite the mess to clean up. I hope we can deal peacefully with your civilization later, until like these Council types."

Before Admiral Korris could reply, the connection was cut, and a sensor officer reported that an escape pod with two life signs had been launched towards their ship. He didn't like this entire situation, after all, the Geth had found an ally! Still, he got what he came for. With his thoughts weighed-down by the presence of the Geth, he ordered a ship to pick up the pod, and for all ships to set a course back to the Theta System.

He had a feeling that this was not the last time he would see the Alliance.

\_A/N: So the next chapter is going to have what you've all been waiting for! POLITICS.\_

**\*\*Chapter 6: INTERLUDE\*\***

**\*\*Fifty Shades of Overkill\*\***

**\*\*Intermission One\*\***

\_\*\*Extragalactic Interference\*\*\_ We had not anticipated this.\*\*\_

\_\*\*It will make no difference. In the end, they too will succumb to the Cycle.\*\*\_

\_\*\*We are perfection, and they shall become one with us.\*\*\_

\_Author's Note: Just a heads up that this story is not dead. I'm going on a little trip, so don't expect updates for a month, per say. So sorry.\_

\_Also, a Guest left a rather hilarious review.\_

"\_Unenjoyable and felt like a waste of time due to the numerous amounts of idiot ball moments and supposed protagonists going full on chaotic evil mode for seemingly no reason aside for the sake of producing "overkill moments".\_"

â€|\_Guest, you are reading a story called "FIFTY SHADES OF OVERKILL". I'm sorry if you came into here with expectations of a

completely serious story, but really, the title says all. I even explicitly state that this story is a light parody on Halo/ME crossovers. In my profile, I told everyone that FSoO is DESTRUCTION PORN.\_

\_Now, everything in this story has a purpose. Things will get much serious later on, as reasons are given for behavior. Things will become clear, but one of the main purposes of this story is to see the Halo races kick the Council's ass. Later on, the fights will become less lopsidedâ€|butâ€|.\_

\_And of course it's overkill. UNSC wartime method of operation is overkill against the Council races, but adequate against the Covenant. The Alliance will adjust their battle tactics against the Council, seeing as they utterly decimated the Council fleet, but until then, they won't know their own strength.\_

\_In addition, the guns are going silent for the upcoming chapters. Sorry. I already packed this story with way too much destruction, and I don't want it to be a broken record.\_

\_Again, this story is semi-serious, but if something utterly ridiculous happens, remember that you are reading FIFTY SHADES OF OVERKILL before you leave some scathing review.\_

\_Sorry if this was a bit rude, but I'm tired of getting reviews containing nothing but insults and no constructive criticism. I want to grow as a writer, and I need all the feedback I can get, but "Horrible story, you suck" doesn't constitute Feedback, dammit.\_

#### 4. Intermission One

\_\*\*A/N: This is a filler intermission so that the story doesn't get taken down. The real purpose is to notify you that the next chapter's outcome will depend on your votes. I fixed the poll on my main page, so be sure to vote Paragon or Renegade, and that will influence the Alliance's actions towards the Council.\*\*\_

**\*\*Intermission One\*\***

In the depths of Council Space, a midnight-black shape drifted through the rings of a gas giant. The planet cast its dark shadow over the shape. The only light was from the blue running lights all along its hull, and the occasional arcing of red lightning. It observed and waited until it was time to summon its brethren to harvest the inhabitants of this galaxy.

It waited patiently, unaware that its plans were about to be hopelessly overturned by an extragalactic invasion.

The Reapers accounted for many possibilities, but in their programmed arrogance, they never stopped to think that maybe they weren't the biggest fish in the sea.

End  
file.